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# Epic Relation:

# The Sacred, History and Late Modernist Aesthetics in Hart Crane, David Jones and Derek Walcott

**By**

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## ABSTRACT

In order to answer questions about the nature, viability and shape of what would constitute a modernist epic, this thesis explores three very different twentieth century writers, Hart Crane, David Jones and Derek Walcott. Rather than being a narrowly genre based study, however, I argue that in the twentieth century the 'epic' mode has become a malleable form with which to explore troubling legacies of history, empire and, to exhibit a dimension of the sacred in modernity. All three poets penned challenging epic poems (*The Bridge*, *The Anathemata* and *Omeros* respectively) in a condition of modernity. Haunted by the ruptures of history, in various ways, Crane, Jones and Walcott attempted to create an aesthetic which seeks cultural reintegration, recovery and reconciliation with the past. I analyse the formal experimental modernist aesthetic of each poet as they are anxiously and sometimes ambivalently influenced by the increasingly dominant institution of a particular form of metropolitan high modernism. This allows for a critique of modernity whilst contextualising a modernist inscription of imperialism. Finally, I show that the spiritual and religious concerns of these writers are essential in the recuperative or compensatory ideals of the epic. I argue that far from being an obsolete and impossible genre, for poets the epic is the very mode which best captures the transitions and conditions of an uneven and unequal modernity. I seek to show how through the trope of place (bridge, city, ruins, sacred sites and island), journey and the sea and other aesthetic devices, Crane, Jones and Walcott attempt to re-enchant emptied and destroyed cultural heritages.

**Epic Relation:**
**The Sacred, History and Late Modernist Aesthetics in**
**Hart Crane, David Jones and Derek Walcott**

In order to examine the characteristics and concerns of the modern epic, this thesis investigates three very different twentieth century writers of epic poems: American poet, Hart Crane; Anglo-Welsh poet, David Jones; and West Indian writer, poet and playwright, Derek Walcott. Rather than being a narrowly genre based study focused solely on the assimilation and reworking of traditional tropes, motifs or conventions of the epic tradition, I argue that in the twentieth century the 'epic' constitutes an experimental poetic mode through which these poets explore troubling legacies of modernity, and history, and attempt to reveal a dimension of the sacred in modernity. I posit a notion of epic which is opposed to theories of epic that would characterise the genre as archaic and moribund, antithetical to modernity. Instead, I view the epic as an open aesthetic form which faces the paradoxes and tensions of modernity in an effort to produce what Ezra Pound famously defined as an epic, a 'tale of the tribe' and a 'poem which includes history'. The thesis will analyse each epic in relation to three interrelated dimensions: a reaction to modernity; the encounter with history; and, the revelation of an artistic vison of the sacred or religious which offers the hope and possibility of transcendence, recovery and renewed spiritual dignity.

All three poets have penned challenging epic poems (*The Bridge*, *The Anathemata* and *Omeros* respectively) in an unstable and turbulent condition of modernity which is characterised by fragmentation, violence, and disenchantment. In their efforts to make sense of and map the historical processes and the effects of a *longue durée* of modernity, each epic as a world-text engages with and reacts critically to the multiple forces of modernity. I focus on the materialist shaping dynamics of multiple modernities which will include how each epic involves a poetic transcription or rewriting of significant dynamics of modernity. In Crane's *The Bridge*, I focus on temporal acceleration and spatial effects in the modernist portrayal of urban transport and space. Jones's *The Anathemata*, composed in fragmentary fashion in the shadow of the recurrent trauma of his Great War experience is marked by the devastation of Total War. The text as archive and therapeutic space records Jones's growing fears of the alienation and technological domination of modernity,

especially its threatening destruction of artistic practice and historical artefacts and knowledge. However, in order to challenge the dehumanising forces of an instrumental modernity that would reduce human endeavours to utilitarian objectives, Jones values the artist and interweaves this with a sacramental theology of history. For Walcott, attuned to the ecological pressures of the fragile island of St. Lucia and the Caribbean, modernity, especially in its neo-liberal late capitalist phase, threatens local culture, its heritage, rituals and ways of being. Walcott, rewrites traditional notions of epic in a hybridised form, in order to redress the fragmented and traumatic legacy of colonialism on the socio-cultural and historical nature of St. Lucia.

Second, each epic engages with the material poetics and cultural politics of epic and modernity in order to fashion a form which is capable of expressing the complexity of modern life. Crane devotes his epic, in part, to reconciling the machine with the body through a use of the sublime experience of the Brooklyn Bridge. Jones, to whom Empire was a form of robbery, places an emphasis on Britain as a diverse nation space with an archaic Celtic-Welsh substrate or Matter of Britain. He lauds the forgotten and buried remains of defeated cultures and provides a haunting analogous situation in the present civilizational phase. Jones's archaeological poetics attempt to recover and hold up the relics of a past and fragile British history, thereby preserving and curating history in poetic form. Walcott in his quarrel with history attempts to fuse and revitalise a traumatic past – his hybrid poetics (European-American-African) are vital to his quest to dignify an 'intimate epic' history of St. Lucia in poetic crossings and travels which re-enact and re-tell the multiple histories of the island.

Last, none of the above two aims and lines of exploration are sufficient if we do not seriously take into account each poet's sense of the sacred which orients and provides meaning to history and everyday daily life. It is what the original etymological definition of religion means when one 'binds' the often fragmentary and contradictory experiences of modernity into a poetics of relation. The key term here is an experience of re-enchantment. Idiosyncratically, Crane adopts religious language of the liturgy and ecstatic enthusiasm and fuses it with the sublime to portray an experience of utopian experience. More formal, or at least 'traditional,' for Jones this is exemplified through Catholic sacramental poetics bound in a belief in the gratuitous value of art which offers hope for revivification of culture. Walcott, despite his antipathy to Catholic traditions, pursues a spiritual poetics which seeks

to sanctify poetic practice and a sacred means of fusion of past cultures. A modern form of the sacred here is syncretistic and hybrid.

This re-enchantment of a world is a fundamental aspect of the epic which has been dismissed by Lukács as archaic and not fit for the loss of faith characteristic of the modern world. Thus, the novel which is supposed to be the quintessential secular form is only suitable as it presents the condition of transcendental homelessness and angst of individual seekers. However, I show that the quest for spiritual knowledge is vital to the search for an epic form. It is expressed in the role of the poet as epic bard, the enchantment of modern life which is both continuous (i.e. never disappeared) and part of a process of recovery and rediscovery of the sacred in modern life. Here poetic traces of religious language, religious ideas are fundamental, not as relics or vestiges, but as living forms integral to epic structure, and as such part of world-text to which the epic aspires to map, order and give meaning to the chaotic panorama of world history.

In order to outline a framework for these three epics, I would like to invoke Édouard Glissant's notion of the poetics of relation which provides an ideal horizon for the possibilities of a modern epic. Glissant writes of a new form of epic,

> wondering if we did not still need such founding works today, ones that would use a similar dialectics of rerouting, asserting, for example, political strength, but, simultaneously, the rhizome of a multiple relationship with the Other and basing every community's reasons for existence on a modern form of the sacred, which would be, all in all, a Poetics of Relation.[1]

Glissant seeks an epic that does not celebrate imperial conquest or domination and enshrines territorial expansion in tales of foundational violence. He rejects the epic which would ground itself in a cultural origin in exclusive chains of pure genealogical lines of inheritance or rooted forms of identity politics – what he terms filiation.[2] Glissant critiques an epic based on monological or totalitarian thinking. This is what he terms the 'excluding epic, of yesterday or of days long past, from the time when human communities conceived

[1] Édouard Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, trans. by Betsy Wing (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1997) p. 16.
[2] Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, p. 50.

of themselves in ethnic and almost genetic terms'.[3] Rather, the 'participatory epic' values complex entangled and interrelated identities manifested in ongoing processes of 'errantry' and exile, or wandering, journeys, and movements backwards and forwards through space and in time.[4] For Glissant, a poetics of relation expresses the mutual yet asymmetrical relationship between self and Other based on mystery, what he calls 'opacity', in 'which each and every identity is extended through a relationship with the Other'.[5] Relation is inextricably tied to modernity which is a product of the collision and encounter of cultures and people. He values mixing, hybridity, fusion and diversity. Thus, the modern epic of relation is based on a poetics which is 'forever conjectural and […] is latent, open, multilingual in intention'.[6] It involves the weaving of different forms and languages. The ideal of relation resists the impulse to order, control, and reduce to the relation with the other to transparent instrumental relationships of 'equivalency'.[7] He writes:

> Modern epic and modern tragedy would express political consciousness (no longer an impossible naïve consciousness) but one disengaged from civic frenzy; they would ground lyricism in a confluence of speech and writing. In this confluence things of the community, without being diminished […] would be initiation to totality without renouncing the particular. In that way modern epic […] would make the specific relative, without having to merge the Other (the expanse of the world) into a reductive transparency.[8]

Finally, Glissant's poetics of relation expresses the integrity and sacred value of the small countries, the mysterious and undisclosed spaces and cultures. Thus, instead of imperial victory and the narration of history by the victorious barbarity of empire, Glissant favours the epic which 'responds to the defeat of a community' whilst it 'still seeks to fortify a

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[3] Édouard Glissant, *Faulkner, Mississippi*, trans. by Barbara Lewis and Thomas C. Spear (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2000), pp. 221-222.
[4] Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, p. 11, p. 18-21.
[5] Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, p. 11.
[6] Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, p. 32.
[7] Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, p. 55.
[8] Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, p. 55.

community's identity and sense of destiny', and yet are 'wandering interrogative, and questioning.[9]

Haunted by the ruptures of history, in various ways, Crane, Jones and Walcott have attempted to create an aesthetic of epic relation which seeks cultural reintegration, recovery and reconciliation with the past. Whilst paying close attention to the formal experimental modernist aesthetic of each poet as they are anxiously and sometimes ambivalently influenced by the increasingly dominant institution of a particular form of metropolitan high modernism. I locate this study at the intersection between postcolonial studies and new modernist studies. Finally, I show that the spiritual and religious concerns of these writers are essential in the recuperative or compensatory ideals of the epic. I argue that far from being an obsolete and impossible genre, for poets the epic is the very mode which best captures the transitions and conditions of an uneven and unequal modernity. Furthermore, I seek to show how through the tropes of place (monuments, ruins and sacred sites), journeys, and the sea, Crane, Jones, and Walcott attempt to preserve and re-enchant emptied and destroyed cultural heritages.

[9] Glissant, *Faulkner, Mississippi*, 18-20

## Chapter One: Twentieth Century Modern Epic: From Negation to Relation

### Troublesome Muse: Invocation of the name 'epic'

The illustrious and yet embattled name of epic has inspired and haunted poets and writers in equal measure. With its grandeur, promise of immortality and laurel-like crown as the pinnacle of poetic achievement, the epic has also been maligned and mocked. Attempts to conquer such literary heights have been dogged by magnificent and ignominious failure. Not many genres have to live up to the gravitas and expectation of the epic. In John Dryden's preface to *The Aeneid,* the epic is 'undoubtedly the greatest work which the soul of man is capable to perform'[1] and for Lascelles Abercrombie it was the epic bard's duty to express 'the accepted unconscious metaphysic of his age'.[2] With such a long history, weighty canonical status given to its forbearers, and charged with ultimate cultural and spiritual significance, the epic has gained a daunting and lofty prestige. This has meant that any modern author consciously attempting to write within and contribute to the tradition has a difficult challenge ahead of him or her.[3] The epic is approached with attitudes ranging

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[1] Dryden, John, cited in Michael André Bernstein, *The Tale of the Tribe: Ezra Pound and the Modern Verse Epic* (Princeton University Press, 1980), p. 3.

[2] Lascelles Abercrombie, *The Epic: An Essay* (London: Martin Secker, 1922), p. 39. The phrase has also been used by E. M. W Tillyard, *The English Epic and its Background* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1966), p. 13.

[3] Although from time to time representations of women and the feminine are important and are discussed, this thesis does not focus on women's writing in the epic mode. I am, however, keenly aware of and sensitive to, but hopefully not guilty of, the perpetuation of the unthinking association of epic with masculinity. It is unfortunately the case that in many respects, with its subject matter of war and its emphasis on the public sphere manifested in the heroic mode, the epic is exclusively (and by patriarchal exclusion) a typically a male domain. Susan Stanford Friedman, whose work on Elizabeth Barrett Browning and H. D. has done much to redress this critical imbalance, has commented that the epic, 'as a narrative of brave men's deeds […] often centers on the 'destiny or 'formation of a race or nation', reflecting a 'comprehensive sweep of history, a cosmic universality of theme, and an elevated discourse of public ceremony'. Susan Stanford Friedman, 'Gender and Genre Anxiety: Elizabeth Barrett Browning and H. D. as Epic Poets', *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature*, 5.2 (Autumn, 1986), pp. 203-228 (p. 204). This has not only led to the genre being the 'preeminent poetic genre of the public sphere from which women have been excluded' but the corollary creation of a binary between epic and lyric. Friedman, 'Gender and Genre Anxiety', pp. 204-205. Bernard Schweizer writes that 'the epic may well be the most exclusively gender coded of all literary genres' making masculinity and epic 'almost coterminous'. Bernard Schweizer, *Approaches to the Anglo-American Female Epic* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), p. 1. Recent scholarship goes a long way to interrogating this critical misunderstanding which has worked against epic, first, in general, mistakenly corroborating the view that the epic died after Milton, and second, against women in particular, as it excludes and denies many female poets who have written in the tradition, challenging it and contributing to it with their own critical and creative innovations. Indeed, Schweizer claims that '[m]uch more so than the male epic, which also re-invented itself over the course of time, the development of the female epic is marked by heightened tension between adherence to and rejection of traditional epic requirements regarding form and content' (Schweizer 3). Notwithstanding the many women whose work is immersed in classical myth and allusion, if one looks for them, examples of

from awe and aspiration, as authors assume an ambitious acceptance of the mantle invoking the prowess and inspiration of the muse (Dante or Milton), or engage with the epic with sceptical reluctance (Tennyson), comic parody (Pope, Byron), and even outright disdain and rejection (Pound). Others for a variety of reasons – self-deprecation, humility, circumspection – simply disown the name, preferring the designation 'novel' or 'long poem', and thereby abandon the genre to an ossified archaic few luminary originals.

The name of epic has always carried with it the twin injunction: to assimilate a cultural and historical worldview – or, in Stephen Sicari's description of Pound, the 'relentless efforts to earn for himself as poet a position of dominance over his culture' – and, to master the tradition of the epic literary past.[4] The desire for epic fulfilment of total cultural expression and the 'inclusion among the greatest of poets' necessarily involves the 'inevitable risks of failure and arrogance' and overestimation.[5] Thus, '[a]mbition and concomitant anxiety go with the epic genre, as do the risk of failure and the accusation of vanity and presumption'.[6] This is not a uniquely twentieth century problem. At least since Milton, poets have treated the genre with a curious mixture of ambition and trepidation. Despite the Romantics' 'epomania,' David Duff notes that along with tragedy the epic was 'doubtless the most anxiety-inducing of genres'.[7] By the Romantic period (and arguably before) 'genres now carried the *burden* of their past' and, given that 'such sensitivity may be a prerequisite for significant achievement in epic,' nineteenth-century hopefuls were left to 'wonder whether there was anything left to be done with the genre after the masterpiece of *Paradise Lost*'.[8]

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women writing specifically in an identifiable epic form also abound: Christine de Pizan in the fifteenth century; Lady Mary Wroth in the sixteenth/seventeenth century; in the nineteenth century Elizabeth Barrett Browning *Aurora Leigh* is founding example; and through the course of the twentieth century poets like H. D., Sharon Doubiago, Alice Notley, and Anne Carson. See Bernard Schweizer. *Approaches to the Anglo and American Female Epic, 1621-1982* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006); Jeremy M. Downes, *The Female Homer: An Exploration of Women's Epic Poetry* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2010); Beshero-Bondar, Elisa, *Women, Epic, and Transition in British Romanticism* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2011); Sara S. Poor and Jana K. Schulman, eds, *Women and Medieval Epic: Gender, Genre, and the Limits of Epic Masculinity* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007). For a study of women poets that eschews the term 'epic', preferring the descriptor 'long poem', see Lynn Keller, *Forms of Expansion: Recent Long Poems by Women* (Chicago, Ill.: University of Chicago Press, 1997).

[4] Stephen Sicari, *Pound's Epic Ambition: Dante and the Modern World* (New York: SUNY Press, 1991), p. ix.

[5] Line Henriksen, *Ambition and Anxiety: Ezra Pound's Cantos and Derek Walcott's Omeros as Twentieth-Century Epics* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2006), p. xviii.

[6] Henriksen, xix.

[7] David Duff, *Romanticism and the Uses of Genre* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 146, p. 147.

[8] Duff, *Romanticism and the Uses of Genre*, p. 146, p. 147.

Perhaps, our own 'modern' misapprehensions may be forgiven. Herbert F. Tucker quotes Tennyson's fraught disavowal of epic aspirations regarding the appellation as a curse:

> I wish that you would disabuse your own minds and those of others, as far as you can, that I am about an Epic of King Arthur. I should be crazed to attempt such a thing in the heart of the 19th Century.[9]

Having noted this initial wariness, it may seem, at best impertinently misguided, and at worst critically injudicious to attach the contested generic title of 'epic' to the three poems under examination in this thesis. Not only have all three authors at various points expressed their own ambivalent reservations about such categorisation, and have even been openly dismissive of the genre, but the very idea that the epic is a viable and relevant form of any meaningful aesthetic or cultural use in the twentieth century has been gravely questioned. Unsurprisingly, the name and idea of the epic, though for different reasons, presented unique challenges to and elicited sceptical responses from Hart Crane, David Jones and Derek Walcott.

Although Hart Crane did not shy away from calling *The Bridge* an epic, and as I argue, earnestly believed in his work to be a modern 'optimistic' epic, he did, nonetheless, express his deep reservations and even spurned the term 'epic'. His designation of the label to describe his poem in some ways reflect the context of his audience as well as a recognition of the more serious aesthetic and philosophical or cultural problems associated with the genre. Interestingly, for Crane the status of *The Bridge* as an epic, at least in part, turns on the cultural capital that it affords. When appealing for financial support to Otto Kahn, a benefactor who would presumably regard the public nature of a poem of epic stature necessary surety or exchange for patronage, Crane would not hesitate to use the term. Partially to buy himself more time and sponsorship, he referred to the poem as an 'epic of the modern consciousness' and actively encouraged the comparison of 'historic and cultural

[9] Lord Alfred Tennyson, qtd. in Herbert Tucker, *Epic: Britain's Heroic Muse, 1790-1910* (Oxford: Oxford University, 2008), p. 2.

scope' of *The Bridge* to 'that great work' Virgil's *Aeneid*.[10] However, privately after the exuberance and confidence of his initial plans for the poem had been tested, Crane would express doubts and fears about the grand ambitions of such a cultural synthesis.[11] And, finally, when faced with harsh criticism from Yvor Winters over the unity and impossible epic pretensions of *The Bridge*,[12] Crane would seem to disown the categorisation entirely:

> Your primary presumption that *The Bridge* was proffered as an epic has no substantial foundation. You know quite well that I doubt that our present stage of cultural development is so ordered yet as to provide the means or method for such an organic manifestation as that. Since your analysis found no evidence of epic form, no attempt to simulate the traditional qualifications or pedantic trappings, – then I wonder what basis you had for attributing such an aim to the work, – unless, perhaps, to submit me to an indignity which might be embarrassing on the grounds that I could be stripped of unjustified pretensions.
>
> The fact that *The Bridge* contains folk lore and other material suitable to the epic form need not therefore prove its failure as a long lyric poem, with interrelated sections. Rome was written about long before the age of Augustus, and I dare say that Virgil was assisted by several well travelled roads to guide him, though it is my posthumous suggestion that when we do have an 'epic' it need not necessarily incorporate a personalized 'hero'.[13]

Crane defends himself against Winters's categorical statement that *The Bridge* was 'not to be called an epic, in spite of its endeavour to create and embody a national myth, because it

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[10] Hart Crane, *O My Land, My Friends: The Selected Letters of Hart Crane*, ed. by Langdon hammer and Brom Weber (New York: Four Walls Eight Windows, 1997), p. 348, p. 349.
[11] See below and especially letter to Waldo Frank, Hart Crane, *O My Land, My Friends*, pp. 257-260.
[12] Winters would categorically state that *The Bridge* was 'not to be called an epic, in spite of its endeavour to create and embody a national myth, because it has no narrative framework and so lacks the formal unity of an epic'. Winters, Yvor Winters, 'The Progress of Hart Crane', in *Critical Essays on Hart Crane*, ed. by David R. Clark (Boston: G. K. Hall & Co., 1982), pp. 102-108 (p. 102). In terms of subject matter and perhaps intention as a national poem *The Bridge* qualifies, but as far as form is concerned and meeting the requirements of what Winters would deem to be characteristic of epic, *The Bridge* falls short. The basis for his disapproving and stinging review extends beyond the queries about a formal unifying factor of narrative to epic. Winters conflates this with an argument about a lack of proper hero and 'destiny' or heroic purpose essential to epic, and in Winters's language this equates to a much wider aspect of epic's duty to fulfil and to perform cultural and moral integrity and purpose.
[13] Hart Crane, *O My Land, My Friends*, pp. 428-429.

has no narrative framework and so lacks the formal unity of an epic'.[14] In Winters's estimation, in terms of subject matter and perhaps intention as a national poem *The Bridge* might just about qualify as epic, but as far as form is concerned, and meeting the requirements of what Winters would deem to be characteristic of epic, *The Bridge* falls hopelessly short. Indeed, it is a 'wreckage' that amounts to 'almost the nature of a public catastrophe'.[15] Winters concluded that no poet 'of comparable ability' has struggled with the epic and 'it seems unlikely that any writer of comparable genius will struggle with it again'.[16] The basis for his stinging review extends beyond the queries about a formal unifying factor of narrative to epic. Winters conflates these characteristic epic criteria with an argument about a lack of a proper hero and 'destiny' or heroic purpose in *The Bridge* that Winters deemed essential to true epic, and defunct with modern values.[17] Winters's judgement equates to a much wider critique of contemporary cultural and moral integrity and the ultimately forlorn possibility for the meaningful purpose of epic in modern life. Crane ill-advisedly and hubristically had undertaken a grandiose task. And yet, it would be a disservice to Crane's poetic ambitions and to misread a vital aspect of *The Bridge* if the term

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[14] Yvor Winters, 'The Progress of Hart Crane', in *Critical Essays on Hart Crane*, ed. by David R. Clark (Boston: G. K. Hall & Co., 1982), pp. 102-108 (p. 102).

[15] See chapter one for more on this criticism. It is enough to note here that Crane's defence of his public poetic persona is particularly keenly felt as an embarrassment and an indignity. The implication is that it is foolhardy and arrogant to have such epic aspirations is given particularly harsh treatment by Winters and Tate. For the review, see Yvor Winters, 'The Progress of Hart Crane', p. 108.

[16] Winters, 'The Progress of Hart Crane', p. 108.

[17] Interestingly Derek Walcott in one of his many at best begrudging accommodations of the epic title or at worst repudiations of it, has argued that Crane's poem fails to be classified as an epic because it does not have a hero nor does it succeed in telling the tale of a tribe. See Interview: Sampietro, Luigi, 'Derek Walcott on Omeros: An Interview', 7 May 2003. Source: Web http://users.unimi.it/caribana/OnOmeros.html Walcott is otherwise in some ways inspired by Hart Crane. He has written a tribute to Crane, frequently taught Hart Crane, and his participation in a documentary testifies to his fascination with Crane. In part, this has to do with Crane's times spent in and writing about the Caribbean (see below), but fundamentally it is to do with Crane's qualities as a poet. As far as David Jones is concerned, Walcott has very little to say, other than a passing comment in a somewhat critical review of Wilson Harris. Walcott describes Harris's *The Guyana Quartet* as an 'awkward monstrosity of an "epic"' which is 'an ambitious, Homeric attempt to project a gigantic, mythological Guiana into the experience of the reader'. Derek Walcott, 'The Muse of the Jungle', in *Derek Walcott, The Journeyman Years, Volume 1: Culture, Society, Literature, and Art: Occasional Prose 1957-1974*, ed. by Gordon Collier (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2013), p. 289. However, he judges the work to be a 'failure', first, because of the immensity, incomprehensibility and obscurity of the symbolic, and also because an 'epic cannot be sustained by endless spasms of intuition'. Walcott demands that Harris 'tell a story'. These comments are extremely interesting in providing us with a retrospective clue to a danger and a path not taken by Walcott in his own epic. Walcott writes, in extremely illuminating ways, especially when one thinks of the 'success' of *Omeros* written some years later, that 'so many modern epics have failed because of their fragmentariness or because their personal visions, compressions and symbols of the poet are too secret for the reader, as Pound's *Cantos*, or David Jones's poems, or the poetry of Charles Williams fail'. Walcott, 'The Muse of the Jungle', p. 289.

'epic' is relinquished in a critical understanding of the poem. Whilst expressing a sceptical and suspicious view about generic fixity, he still sought an innovative 'modern equivalent of the old epic form' that he admitted could 'be called by some other name' since 'the old definition' seemed redundant or misleading as it 'cannot cover the kind of poem' that he envisaged 'except on certain fundamental points'.[18] Implicitly Crane believed and hoped that he would be able to 'overcome' any 'limitations' and realise a modern epic in a 'new form'.[19]

David Jones seemed less concerned with specific generic disputes over the term 'epic', and despite his considerable classical knowledge he never categorically aligned his poetry with the genre.[20] Rather, perhaps sensing the cultural incongruity of the epic in the modern era, he harboured a feeling that what he was writing, or making, was in some sense uncategorisable. Jones laments that it 'may be that the kind of thing I have been trying to make is no longer makeable in the kind of way in which I have tried to make it'.[21] Often Jones would simply term his work as 'writing' – *The Anathemata* is entitled 'Fragments of an Attempted Writing'. Rather than cleaving to either any traditional notion of an epic form or a particularly programmatic or manifesto-like modernist experimental poetics, Jones was guided by his own auto-didactic method in which 'the *form* of *The Anathemata* was determined by the inner necessities of the thing itself' which amounted to what he would describe as an 'eclectic or patch-work or catch-as-catch-can method'.[22] In his preface to *The Anathemata* Jones touches explicitly on this question of how to describe what it is he has produced:

> I regard my book more as a series of fragments, fragmented bits, chance scraps really, of records of things, vestiges of sorts and kinds of *disciplinae*.[23]

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[18] Hart Crane, *O My Land, My Friends*, p. 287.
[19] Hart Crane, *O My Land, My Friends*, p. 287.
[20] For a discussion of the possibility of epic, and whether *The Anathemata* may be justifiably termed one, see, Martin Potter, 'David Jones's *The Anathemata*: Is Modern Epic Possible?', *University of Bucharest Review: A Journal of Literary and Cultural Studies*, 12.1 (2010), pp. 107-114.
[21] David Jones, *The Anathemata* (London: Faber and Faber, 2010), p. 15.
[22] David Jones, qtd. in Kathleen Henderson Staudt, *At the Turn of Civilization: David Jones and Modern Poetics* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994), pp. 189-190.
[23] Jones, *Anathemata*, p. 34.

Jones's *In Parenthesis* with its martial subject matter and the allusive context drawn especially from epic literature is more readily accepted as an epic, but scholarly consensus is more divided over the form and genre of *The Anathemata*.[24] Some, including W. H. Auden who praised *The Anathemata* as 'a contemporary epic' in a review for *Encounter* in 1954,[25] have been more readily willing to use the epithet 'epic' to describe Jones's work. The debate has centred around the nature of the form of the poem with critics divided over whether it represents a more modernist instantiation of a closed form (an autonomous spatial form with the Catholic Mass and quest motif as structuring principles) or an 'open form' which would view Jones's work as more of a vanguard work. George Steiner described *The Anathemata* as a 'prologomena to future forms'.[26]

Derek Walcott has been even more reticent and notoriously resistant when it has come to him categorically defining *Omeros* as an epic. He has vacillated from outright rejection of the genre, even facetiously claiming to have not read Homer in its entirety, to acquiescing to the name epic in an ameliorated form, as 'intimate work' or 'domestic epic'.[27] As I show, for Walcott the term 'epic' is freighted with problematic historical and cultural political baggage as a genre of imperial and colonial domination, and the politics of writing an 'epic' are entangled in the fractious questions of authenticity, mimicry, primitivism, cultural authority, historical representation and aesthetic and ethical responsibility. Again critics have taken very different positions on the matter. Broadly the lines can be drawn between those who regard the poem as part of an epic genre. They may be either in strong favour (traditionalists) or opposition (anti-classicalists) to a classical epic lineage especially focussed on Homer and Virgil. Others are indifferent and seek to downplay any influence and connection to the epic mode. Finally, there are those who prefer a more creative postcolonial resistance to epic that remakes and reforms the genre beyond anything that may be deemed a classical epic, at least certainly as the Western canon would conceive of it.[28]

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[24] See section dealing with war, violence and the modern epic below.
[25] See W. H. Auden, 'A Contemporary Epic', *Encounter*, 2.2 (1954), pp. 67-71.
[26] George Steiner, *Language and Silence: Essays 1958-1966* (London: Faber and Faber, 1967), p. 309. See below and Kathleen Henderson Staudt's discussion in the conclusion of her book, *At the Turn of a Civilization*, pp. 183-194.
[27] Derek Walcott, 'Reflections on Omeros', The Poetics of Derek Walcott: Intertextual Perspectives, ed. by Gregson Davis, Special Issue of *South Atlantic Quarterly*, 96.2 (Spring 1997), pp. 229-246 (p. 240).
[28] For this critical 'taxonomy' see, Paul Jay, 'Fated to Unoriginality: The Politics of Mimicry in Derek Walcott's *Omeros*', *Callaloo*, 29.2 (2006), pp. 545-559.

These combinations of doubts, recrimination and reticence over the name of epic stem in one sense from the demands of epic and can be explained by the 'fear that arises as the poet faces the grandiosity and immodesty of his project'.[29] This fear results in 'explicit efforts to distance himself from the initial ambition, denying that the text before us claims to be an epic'.[30] Part of this can be accounted for by Bloomian anxiety of influence, and indeed, as Henriksen has argued the trope of disavowal has been internalised and sublimated, especially since Dante's invocation of the moral virtue of humility and modesty essential to the epic bard.[31]

If the writers find themselves in such a predicament there can be no hope for critics attempting to perform feats of literary classification and evaluation of such a slippery word and yet paradoxically obdurate genre.[32] More serious, however, are the deeper doubts over, first, the changeability in the nature of epic which entails definitional and naming problems, and, second, the ultimate question regarding the possibility of epic in a modern

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[29] Henriksen, p. xviii.

[30] Henriksen, p. xviii.

[31] In some senses, this rhetorical move occurs earlier in epic literary history through the invocation of the muse. Such displacement allows for a diminution of any personal aggrandisement in favour of divine inspiration, transpersonal memory and remembrance, and collective cultural authority. In Dante it is given a greater Christian depth and resonance, and must be considered alongside the Christian poet's grapples with the pagan sources and epic predecessors. As Henriksen suggests, though, this perpetuation of a rhetoric or *topos* leads to a paradox and the thinly veiled ambition resurfaces: if 'recantation' is an 'epic *topos* with inevitable allusive and formulaic connotations' in Dante, Pound and Walcott, then 'the poet's self-doubt and declaration of regret paradoxically become additional indications of his desire to belong to the family of grand epic poets, and eventually turn out to be the final proof of his epic ambition'. Henriksen, p. xix Unfortunately, this logic – essentially of 'the epic poet doth protest too much, methinks' – constrains the critic and poet alike within a circular logic of epic definition. For the use of this trope by Derek Walcott see: Gregson Davis, '"With No Homeric Shadow": The Disavowal of Epic in Derek Walcott's *Omeros*', *South Atlantic Quarterly*, 96.2 (1997), pp. 321-333.

[32] The word obdurate is also used with slightly different inflection by Peter Baker, *Obdurate Brilliance: Exteriority and the Modern Long Poem* (Gainsville: University Press of Florida, 1991). Whilst Baker refuses the term 'epic', and prefers the description 'long poem', his thesis broadly complements mine. He argues 'against *interiority*' or an interpretive model of the modern long poem which would privilege a lyric subjectivity 'still assumed to be a consistent integrated ego with discernible thoughts and emotions'. Baker, *Obdurate Brilliance*, p. 1. I think Baker overplays this reading of lyric – certainly there has been subsequent work on the lyric which suggests just the opposite, and casts doubt on the assumed unity of the lyric speaker. Where I do agree with Baker is in his characterisation of the 'model of textural production' which he argues is based on '*exteriority*': 'works which deliberately turn the notion of the lyric speaker inside-out'. Baker, *Obdurate Brilliance*, p. 1. He sees the development of the modern long poem from the epic, but lacking the 'cultural consensus of values' that the epic would afford, he challenges the widely held notion that the epic hero migrates or is dislocated into a new form, the epic consciousness of the heroic modern poet. He counters this by showing, through studies of Saint-John Perse, Pound, Stein, Zukofsky, and Ashbery, that these poets 'are in fact seeking to achieve the level of ethicity present in the successful epic poems of the past, but in the absence of the traditional epic hero and without centering on their own internal feelings or experiences'. Baker, *Obdurate Brilliance*, p. 2.

era. Regarding the latter, which will be discussed more fully later, Tucker provides the uncomfortable diagnosis of what may be called our condition of the epic when he writes that critics 'who apply the stethoscope of literary history to the "heart of the 19th Century"' are not 'immune to the stress that made Tennyson's murmur'.[33] Tucker emphasises not only the similarity of our predicament or 'rash of doubts' that authors and critics 'bring to the very idea of epic,' but he also argues that the continuity of these issues is 'rooted in the modernity that our moment shares with that not so very bygone time'.[34] Whilst the modernist challenge to accomplish an epic may be intensified and exacerbated by the conditions of late modernity, these influences stretch back in their origins at least to the seventeenth and eighteenth century. Tucker stoically begins his book with the observation that since the epic has been charged with the formidable task of expressing 'the accepted unconscious metaphysic of his age', then:

> [f]or all of us, in the twenty-first century as in the nineteenth, the prospect of writing an epic poem devoted to such a mission – in truth, even the prospect of faithfully *reading* one – savors of a dare; embarked upon, it has about it the feeling of a stunt; and the result, whatever other qualities it may claim, cannot well avoid being regarded as a freak.[35]

This sense of the outrageous dare in turn creates a critical uncertainty and poses a serious challenge for any study that would attempt to label a poem a modern epic, a category that is viewed as an anachronism or anomalous. It also intensifies the evaluative judgement brought to bear on a poem that has even remotest has epic qualities. No poem is more likely to be judged a failure than one that has a whiff of epic aspiration.

As far as the very word 'epic' itself is concerned, it has undergone at least two types of 'diversifications' potentially resulting in indeterminacy, vagueness and inaccuracies. First, its use has proliferated in popular usage as an adjective appended to all manner of experiences and things from the sublime to the ridiculous.[36] Second, and in many regards

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[33] Tucker, Heroic Muse, p. 3.
[34] Tucker, Heroic Muse, p. 3.
[35] Tucker, Heroic Muse, p. 3.
[36] In her own 'most unscientific and superficial survey of newspaper outputs', Joanna Paul has found that from 2006 to 2007 the indiscriminate use of the word in popular discourse 'functions as an adjective signifying scale,

more a justifiable and unavoidable usage, as a noun, in criticism the term epic has had any number of adjectives affixed to it in order to modulate and describe the multiple inflections epic has been given by writers over time and in different contexts. This creates a series of competing sub-categories: the primary or secondary epic, folk epic, mock-epic, and more recently the modern epic, the anti-epic, post-epic, female epic, pocket epic, postcolonial epic and so on. Ostensibly one could push both these vexing word usages to absolute absurdity: the final straw would be the contradictory and nonsensical tautology: 'epic epic'.[37] My focus is on various instantiations of epic that do require adjectival alteration according to a range of factors especially including period, situation, and theme. I hope to show that something of the conventions and assumptions of what an epic might be or aspire to be is used in conjunction and juxtaposition with the actual poetic text, to reveal a transformation and re-orientation of the form.[38]

Could one answer or response to these semantic vagaries be simply to dispense with the term altogether? Is there, in Crane's words an alternative, and can the modern epic 'be called by some other name'?[39] Perhaps the most likely and most commonly preferred term is 'long poem'. The term has its equivalent in Rosenthal and Gall's 'poetic sequence'.[40] For them the modern poetic sequence is 'the decisive form toward which all the developments of modern poetry have tended' and as such it is the 'genre which best encompasses the

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significance, or importance' was used 'on average, nearly 700 hundred times a month (and approximately forty-five times a month in headlines)'. Joanna Paul, *Film and the Classical Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), pp. 2-3.

[37] Arguably, as Joanna Paul has shown, this has already happened: consider the vernacular slang term 'epic fail' Joanna Paul, p. 3.

[38] Indeed, this is the line of approach taken by most modern critics including Tucker, Dentith, Blanton and others. For example, Tucker organises his book chronologically and varies his characterisation of epic through the eighteenth and nineteenth century according to both period and a generalised type which is in conversation with the overall development of epic. An example, germane to Hart Crane's epic style, will suffice: Tucker views the 1850s as the 'decade of epic spasmody', and describes this form of epic poetry as influenced by the 'Romantic tenets' such as 'centrality of the self, the sanctity of the movement of heightened perception, and the totality of truth to which creative poets enjoy privileged if fitful access'. Tucker, *Heroic Muse*, p. 339, p. 340.

[39] Hart Crane, *O My Land, My Friends*, p. 287.

[40] M. L. Rosenthal and Sally Gall, *The Modern Poetic Sequence: The Genius of Modern Poetry* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983). Since this book and often tending to discuss the often difficult to categorise postmodern poetry there have been other studies focused through the lens of the term long poem. Especially relevant to this thesis, and to which these authors refer to the poems studied are: Margaret Dickie, *On the Modernist Long Poem* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1986); Joe Moffett, *The Search for Origins in the Twentieth-Century Long Poem: Sumerian, Homeric, and Anglo-Saxon* (Morgantown: West Virginia University Press, 2007); Edwin Morgan, *Long poems - But How Long?: W.D. Thomas Memorial Lecture* (University College of Swansea. Swansea: University of Wales, Swansea, 1995); Brian McHale, *The Obligation Toward the Difficult Whole: Postmodernist Long Poems*. (Tuscaloosa, Ala.: University of Alabama Press, 2004).

shift in sensibility' from a collective epic poem that invokes tradition through the muse and lauds heroic action in a public elevated ceremonial form to a private lyric voice that celebrates the individual and explores consciousness and emotion.[41] For them, the poetic sequence best describes the innovative reaction to a crisis in traditional ideologies which accompanies modernity along with the modernist turn inwards, extending the possibilities for the lyric mode.[42] For Rosenthal and Gall this term accounts for the lyric qualities in longer poems, and as such I would not entirely dispute its efficacy or appropriateness, especially for collections which do not have a preoccupation with identifiable epic concerns.[43]

However, with regard to categorisation, there is overlap between the terms that in some respects creates an unnecessary competition between them. Interestingly in Rosenthal and Gall's categorisation they group David Jones and Hart Crane together under a section focusing on 'neo-regionalism and epic memory'. These poems are characterised by questions involving place and locality. By necessity, then, they deal with the 'haunting sense of a world of buried memory' which has 'much to do with the epic dimension of a poetic sequence'.[44] Their description of the neo-regional poetic sequence sounds remarkably like what a description of a modern epic might approximate to. Such a work 'involves powerful recovery of the deepest memories of a region or nation' and their 'heroism resides in its refusal to yield up cultural memory to oblivion'.[45] The poem attempts

[41] Rosenthal and Gall, p. 3. They explore a wide range of examples in their study grouped according to location and in terms of subjectivity and the confessional mode: Whitman, Dickinson and later Edgar Lee Masters, T. S. Eliot, Ezra Pound (American); Housman, Hardy and Yeats (British); and, Stevens and W. H. Auden as meditative poets and Lowell, Berryman, Plath, are confessional instantiations.

[42] The experimental sensibility attributed to the poetic sequence is a 'response to the lyrical possibilities of language opened up by those pressures in times of cultural and psychological crisis, when all certainties have many times been thrown chaotically into question' and it 'fulfils the need for encompassment of disparate and often powerfully opposed tonalities and energies'. Rosenthal and Gall, p. 3. For another discussion of the long poem which shifts its emphasis to the implication for lyric poetry see Rachel Blau Du Plessis, 'Lyric and Experimental Long Poems: Intersections', in *Time in Time: Short Poems, Long Poems, and the Rhetoric of North American Avant-gardism, 1963-2008*, ed. by Mark J. Smith (Montréal, Québec: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2013), pp. 22-51. Here Du Plessis develops the possibilities of the long poem as it faces (like epic) a classic dismissal from Edgar Allan Poe who famously declared the long poem to be not just impossible or a contraction, but actually no not exist.

[43] The relationship between lyric and epic within these poems is a complicated, and as such I would not want to rule out the obvious lyric qualities and sensibilities especially in Crane and Walcott. Both are fine lyric poets. However, in both these poems the lyric is modulated by an epic vision (*The Bridge*) or by an epic narrative (*Omeros*).

[44] Rosenthal and Gall, pp. 271-272.

[45] Rosenthal and Gall, p. 273.

to reach 'a state of awareness that reaffirms a transcendent identity – the sense of long continuity between the significant past and the freshest involvement of the present moment, and of one's own place in this continuity.[46]

There is very little difference in this description and Pound's characterisation of the epic as the tale of the tribe, which raises the question whether there is any profit gained by changing the term. Indeed, it is roughly cognate with the recent term 'pocket-epic' which is a much more useful designation in an appreciation of the three modern epics discussed in this thesis.[47] Even whilst they resist the title of epic, Rosenthal and Gall acknowledge the tendency for some modern poetic sequences 'like a camel or a mountain or a whale or – to return to things literary – an epic poem'.[48] Yet in their analysis they implicitly privilege poetic explorations of subjectivity and consciousness through the lyric mode. This dichotomy belies the complex balance these poets sought between collective and individual consciousness, and possibly even distorts their aims as they aspired to a measure of impersonality and objectivity beyond the individual all the while retaining what could be termed a modulated lyric sensibility characterised by heightened emotion and experience.

Other proponents for the exclusive use of the appellation 'long poem' argue that the redundant and restrictive label 'epic' which is used to describe modern long poems would best be replaced by a more expansive and neutral term which encompasses a more diverse range of styles and forms and accommodates them together without privileging any previous model. As for Rosenthal and Gall, this would allow for lyric poems in a sequence to be more readily grouped together and not disqualified from the epic canon, but it would also arguably allow for other forms to be included, so that neither epic nor lyric are given generic precedent to determine critical readings. Also by attempting to sidestep deterministic debates over genre, it is hoped that the use of the term 'long poem' in this sense attains a measure of inclusivity and freedom from ideological assumptions allowing for a greater diversity of poetic voices to be heard.[49]

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[46] Rosenthal and Gall, p. 273.

[47] See discussion below, and Nigel Alderman, 'Introduction to Pocket Epics: British Poetry after Modernism', *The Yale Journal of Criticism*, 13.1 (2000): pp. 1-2.

[48] Rosenthal and Gall, p. 3.

[49] Lynn Keller argues that,

> Critical models from earlier decades tend to recognize as long poems only works which fit a single pattern based on a particular generic precedent, usually epic or lyric. Recently, factionalized debates about current poetic schools – concerning the relative merits of 'open' and 'closed' forms, of free verse and formalism, of lyric, narrative, or language-centred experiment – have resulted in similar

In its purest form the 'long poem' would dissolve all genres which flow into it or at least be an aesthetic form in which multiple forms interact openly in an interrelated dynamic embracing difference and contradiction. This view of the long poem delineated by postmodern critics has sought not to valorise a single founding genre at the expense of another as they merge, jostle, and coalesce in the long poem. The long poem, 'parodies the nostalgia for the retrieval of generic origins while incorporating this search within its own textual body' and the 'denial of an overriding structure of generic authority posits the long poem as an instance of *mise en abyme* – a genre without a genre'.[50]

There are good ideological and aesthetic reasons for considering these definitional decisions. First, and most obviously, acceptance of the criticism of the limiting and censorial implications of an all too narrow conception of epic acknowledges that the genre has become entrenched in a particular canon formation with adverse exclusionary cultural implications especially for gender, sexuality, and race.[51] This has led to suspect policing of the epic. E. M. W. Tillyard, whose requirement that the epic be 'choric' and therefore express the 'big multitude of men of whose most serious convictions and dear habits,' leads him to a sweeping and bigoted exclusion. Neither mad nor a deviant, the epic poet 'must be centred in the normal, he must measure the crooked by the straight', and as such no 'pronounced homosexual, for instance, could succeed in the epic, not so much for being one as for what his being one cuts him off from'.[52]

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> privileging of one or another type of long poem as the authentic item. These critical practices have impeded recognition of a pervasive drive among contemporary poets of both sexes and multiple poetic camps toward sustained, ambitious poetic forms.

Lynn Keller, *Forms of Expansion: Recent Long Poems by Women* (Chicago: University of Chicago press, 1997), p. 1.

[50] In typical terms: 'It is […] not a fixed object but a mobile event, the act of knowing its limits, its demarcated margins, its integrated literary kinds. The long poem ceases to be a kind of a kind by becoming the kind of its other'. Smaro Kamboureli, *On the Edge of Genre: The Contemporary Canadian Long Poem* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991), p. 101. Also, qtd. in Keller, p. 13

[51] Lyn Keller was writing in the late 1990s and her important interventions on behalf of neglected voices was significant in opening up the field of the long poem.

[52] E. M. W. Tillyard, 'The Nature of Epic', in Parnassus Revisited: Modern Critical Essays on the Epic Tradition, ed. by Anthony C. Yu (Chicago: American Library Association, 1973). pp. 42-53 (p. 48). This is not to deny that the epic has not been constructed in such terms, and that it has been difficult or not an easy choice of genre for women and homosexuals and other 'minorities' to write. Nonetheless such exclusions are not only distasteful but factually wrong. What are the implications for Walt Whitman, Elizabeth Barrett Browning and others? Or of the homoerotic in classical epic? Furthermore, this narrow definition would leave out the innovative poems that extend, appropriate, rewrite and reshape traditional heteronormative definitions and conventions of epic. An epic is still an epic, arguably it is a better epic, when it challenges and exposes the contradictions of a cultural ideology. For critical studies relevant to Crane, the epic and sexuality see: Catherine Davies, *Whitman's Queer Children: America's Homosexual Epics* (London: Bloomsbury Academic,

Second, Smaro Kamboureli's approach is useful given both the indeterminacy and instability of genre itself and also the innovative experimentalism of Crane, Jones and Walcott's work. The ideas of relation and hybrid forms are essential, and certainly none of these works conform to or perpetuate a hegemonic or monological conception of epic – indeed, they all take as their aims the challenge and reaction to such ideologies, both aesthetic and imperial.

However, despite the allure of the use of the designation 'long poem', on closer examination the fix-all solution either replicates and creates problems of its own or simply displaces or ignores problems it hopes to resolve. The term encourages bland vagueness, and rather than positively defining a poetic mode it weakly assuages confusion by surrendering specificity to obscuring diversity. Joseph Conte, who proposes a sharpening of the term (instead of 'long poem' he proposes the 'serial poem') and argues strongly against collapsing the epic into the long poem, warns that the term 'long poem' 'tries overmuch not to offend the interested parties, but in doing so, suits virtually no one'.[53] Itching for a confrontation and an honest open contest between the terms, Conte dismisses mollifying attempts to erase categorical differences between epic and the contemporary long poem by claiming that this merely 'seeks to suppress for the sake of polite conversation a great number of structural or generic expectations'.[54] One of the primary difficulties 'lies in the apprehension that the term 'long poem' refers only to volume, and says nothing about the form or the content of the work'.[55]

Even the viability of the description long poem is accepted, questions immediately arise concerning exactly how long a long poem ought to be. This further confuses and

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2013); Robert K. Martin, *The Homosexual Tradition in American Poetry* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1998); Thomas Yingling, *Hart Crane and the Homosexual Text: New Thresholds, New Anatomies* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1990).

[53] Joseph Conte, 'Seriality and the Contemporary Long Poem', *Sagetrieb*, 11 (Spring & Fall 1992), pp. 35-45 <https://www.acsu.buffalo.edu/~jconte/Seriality_Sagetrieb.htm> [accessed 5th September 2017]. There is no mistaking Conte's allegiance in what he describes in his 'uncouth' manner as the 'irresolvable conflict between the ambitions of the modern epic and its closest rival, the serial poem'. Conte, 'Seriality', np. He categorically favours the postmodern serial poem (his refined term for the long poem). In distinguishing between the epic and the postmodern serial poems, he underscores the 'profound […] structural difference' between the two forms, and concludes that the 'practice of these poets in the random, modular, and infinite form of the series provides a distinct alternative to the overburdened tradition and the claptrap of epic poetry'. Conte, 'Seriality', np.

[54] Conte, 'Seriality', np.

[55] Conte, 'Seriality', np.

undermines the relatively deceptive and self-explanatory definition that the classification 'long poem' seems to provide.[56] Of course, exact definition of length is also a problem which the epic shares. The debate over suitable length has a long history going back to Aristotle's contention that an epic should be at least as long as three tragedies, and possibly a satyr play.[57] When both terms carry such concerns it is not immediately obvious why one should favour a replacement.

In addition, the very qualities of hybridity and the variety of multiple forms which Keller and Kamboureli claim as a special defining feature of long poems are in fact arguably well-established features of the epic genre. Ambitious length and grand scale have long been associated with epic and are accepted as one of the core defining epic conventions. Whilst the epic may share with the long poem the uncertainty over the exact quantification of length as a measure, nevertheless 'no mere count of lines or pages can decide when an epic scope has been attained,' and there is a 'threshold where the reader is identifiably addressed as the member of a collectivity that knows itself as such in historical time'.[58] If

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[56] Susan Stanford Friedman imagines a difficult conversation trying to define a long poem with a persistent student:

> 'What is a "long poem?"' a student might ask. 'Why, silly-billy,' we can answer from our Olympian Heights, 'a "long poem" is a poem that is long.' 'Do you mean narrative poetry?' the student might persist in asking. 'No,' we can answer in pluralist righteousness, 'it can be narrative or lyric or even prose or any combination thereof, just so long as it's "long."' 'How long is "long"? Fifty pages? A volume?' the student, who is by now getting obnoxious, might continue. 'Is a "sequence" too short for a "long poem"? Is an epic too long to be a "long poem"?' 'No, no, no,' say we in final exasperation, 'can't you see the beauty of our term??? The "long poem" is simply *anything* that is *long*. It is the great umbrella for everything that is not *short*.'

Susan Stanford Friedman, 'When a "Long" Poem Is a "Big" Poem: Self-Authorizing Strategies in Women's Twentieth-Century "Long Poems"', *Lit: Literature Interpretation Theory*, 2.1 (1990), pp. 9-25 (p. 11). Also see Edwin Morgan, *Long poems - But How Long?: W.D. Thomas Memorial Lecture*, University College of Swansea (Swansea: University of Wales, 1995).

[57] For the original reference see, Walter Allen Jr., 'The Epyllion: A Chapter in the History of Literary Criticism', *Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association*, 71 (1940), pp. 1-26. Allen is highly critical of the use of the term epyllion in strict classical terms. He argues that its existence is based on a spurious and scanty literary spat between Callimachus and Apollonius, and as such it ought not to be even considered a literary type. In fact, this exhibits a 'folly' of literary scholars that 'the authorities have neglected the duty of proving that any genre existed in antiquity to which this name can be applied' which would lead to the absurd position of 'authors writing in a definite literary form before it was known that there was such a form and that they believed themselves to be writing in that form'. Allen, p. 4. More germane to the modern epic, however, Erik Martiny introduces the arcane and troubled genre (sometimes even called a non-genre) the epyllion as a precursor to the modern foreshortened epyllion. Sharon Olds's 'The Language of Brag' and Derek Walcott's *Tiepolo's Hound* seem to conform to it. See Erik Martiny, 'Miniature Epic: The Contemporary Genre of the Foreshortened Epyllion', in *Elle S'etend, l'epopee/The Epic Expands: Relecture et Ouverture du Corpus Epique/Rereading & Widening the Epic Corpus*. Ed. by Vincent Dussol (Bruxelles; Oxford: Peter Lang, 2012), pp. 311-319.

[58] Tucker, *Heroic Muse*, p. 16.

long poem is to cross the epic threshold it will have to widen its range, include a variety of ideas, stories, knowledges, and, most significantly, other poetic forms. Beyond sheer scale, one of the surest means to attaining this scope, or 'epic aggrandizement' as Tucker calls it, is one of the 'commonplace' conventions of epic: 'genre-absorption'.[59] Tucker provides two references to support this accepted standard feature of epic:

> Epic Poem […] comprehends within its Sphere all the other kinds of Poetry whatsoever.[60]

And,

> The epic is thus the sum of all poetry – tragedy, comedy, lyric, dirge, are all blended in its great furnace into one glorious metal, and one colossal group.[61]

Such a focus on one aspect of a form – its length – seems to be a dubious and reductive definitional criterion for a broad categorisation, one which would obscure other vital elements that might be activated in another term. Tucker (contra Conte) goes on to argue figuratively that in a contest in which genres are 'grappling or repelling each other' it is the case that our 'literary history has often been too quick to call in favour of the modern challenger'.[62] In a bout where the long poem is an 'upstart contender for generic supremacy,' Tucker has his money on the epic's 'generic amplitude from which poetry's shuffling preference today for the nondescript "long poem" seems a regrettable declension into one thin dimension'.[63] In the end a 'long poem' may be consumed by the 'epic'.

More seriously, the term 'long poem' may in the end not be as ideologically open or accommodating as critics would like it to be. Susan Stanford Friedman, who finds both long poem and epic troubling terms, raises such concerns arguing that the 'name "long poem" is deceptively simple and descriptive – neutral, un-weighted, un-overdetermined, as if it had achieved a value-free, scientific objectivity' but that in its 'seeming inclusive neutrality, the

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[59] Tucker, *Heroic Muse*, p. 17.
[60] Joseph Trapp, qtd. in Tucker, *Heroic Muse*, p. 17, n. 25.
[61] Andrew Lang, qtd. in Tucker, *Heroic Muse*, p. 17 n. 25.
[62] Tucker, *Heroic Muse*, p. 18.
[63] Tucker, *Heroic Muse*, p. 18.

term may obscure the exclusionary politics inherent in genre categories'.[64] It is the very attack on such 'exclusionary politics' within the genre that gives the new epic its strength, interest and complexity, thereby keeping the genre evolving. The epic as a genre has the albeit paradoxical virtue of patently and obviously carrying troubled ideological past and tradition so that any intervention will by necessity directly confront and contest the epic on its own ground. This is what Friedman terms an 'epic grid' and it provides female authors in her study (homosexual, marginal and colonial writers) with the basis for a feminisation of the epic. In order to appreciate fully the remarkability and success of the female epic, or the modern epic, it must be acknowledged as one. As an epic, then, it is clearly 'a text that radically departs from those conventions [and] gains its special effect from the absence of what we expect to be present'.[65] In other words, the conscious and purposeful artistic 're-scriptions of epic conventions, modern "long poems" depend for their ultimate effect on our awareness of the epic norms they undo and redo'.[66] By keeping the name of epic active, rather than losing valuable hard-won critical traction by using the 'long poem' to try to capture these effects, we recognise that 'these departures from epic convention gain their particular power from being read within the epic grid'.[67]

Recognising these problems in a genre does not necessarily preclude the use of the term epic. Nor does it necessarily imply that epic is redundant, necessitating a replacement term. Circumspection in the applicability of both the labels of epic and long poem is key. Satisfactory and productive use of the epic category warrants a more malleable and flexible understanding of the genre of epic, which itself is open to its own internal variants and challenges. However, most especially in the case of the poems studied here, the relative gain accrued from the connotative and associative thematic references, the undoubted genealogical connections to the epic tradition, and the invaluable (even when critical) implications of theoretical and philosophical thought on epic from Hegel to Bakhtin far offsets the suggested benefits from the purported flexibility of the term 'long poem'. In fact, the term seems quite anodyne when compared with the complex richness of the term epic

[64] Stanford Friedman, 'When a "Long Poem"', p. 9.
[65] Stanford Friedman, 'When a "Long Poem"', p. 10.
[66] Stanford Friedman, 'When a "Long Poem"', p. 11.
[67] Stanford Friedman, 'When a "Long Poem"', p. 11.

which suggestively, both consciously and unconsciously for writers, raises questions of modernity/coloniality, empire, culture and tradition.

Clearly no amount of denial or evasion will solve the problem of the persistence and troublesome name of epic and for better or for worse I will settle on the term epic. If we accept the 'name *epic*' then we can note that it functions as a 'tool or map for organizing our experience of the textual world', and as a result it 'provides us with a set of expectations to be met (or more rarely, not met) by a text'.[68] But what is the map of the modern epic? We will need to decode its key or legend in order to orient ourselves in this territory so as to be able to delineate its boundaries and scale, mark its sites and monuments, and examine its terrain. Drawing on Simon Dentith's approach, but concentrating on the twentieth century, I too would like to envisage the epic as 'both history and a map'.[69] In addition to a literary history of epic which would chart the aesthetic features of the genre, this dual approach reveals that 'history and geography are inseparable' in producing a 'map of the world according to epic' which is at once a 'history of certain of its people' and also a 'conceptual map' which traces an 'interrelated set of ideas', problems and germane to the selected writers.[70]

In the next section I will attempt to answer the following questions: What does the name 'epic' signify in generic terms? Is there a 'baseline' definition which will be suitable to accommodate the poems focused on in this thesis? What characteristics and conventions have been associated with the form, and to which any modern epic would by necessity relate? And, finally, rather than a specific genre corresponding to a set of identifiable qualities, is the modern epic better conceived of as a mode or a form of poetic inquiry, knowledge and practice embedded in a specific historical context?

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[68] Jeremy Downes, *Recursive Desire: Rereading Epic Tradition* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1997), p. 2.
[69] Simon Dentith, *Epic and Empire in Nineteenth Century Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 2.
[70] Simon Dentith, *Epic and Empire*, p. 2.

## Genre:[71] characteristics of epic and epic as mode

First, it is pertinent to acknowledge that like the generic term 'epic', 'genre' too is a troubled and beleaguered mode of criticism. In introducing genre into film studies, Rick Altman laments that the 'historical study of genre can hardly be characterized as a satisfying enterprise' as it progresses 'in slow motion' and 'traces a particularly zigzag trajectory'.[72] In Dickensian fashion, the case of genre is not unlike the 'scarecrow of a suit' of Jarndyce and Jarndyce which has 'become so complicated, that no man alive knows what it means' and it has unfortunately passed into a highly specialised and abstruse joke.[73]

Unsurprisingly, then, many scholars exhibit varying degrees of ambivalence about the notion of genre with mixed responses ranging from dogged defence, to polemical dismissal, to those accommodating and recuperative. On the one hand, genre has increasingly been called into disrepute and faced serious criticisms over its legitimacy, applicability and plausibility; yet, on the other, still having currency and stock in operation and exchange, especially in the commercial sphere, the publishing and film industry, genre is undeniably of practical use for readers and viewers in the general public and marketers who depend on generic terminologies to expedite their production and guide the consumption of cultural products.[74] Frederic Jameson adds another nuanced twist to the situation. Whilst he argues that genre has been 'thoroughly discredited by modern literary

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[71] It may be necessary to make some preliminary methodological points about my approach to genre in the study. These will hopefully shed light on the nature of and assumptions made in genre criticism focused on epic whilst also illustrating what may be at stake in an examination of modern epic. Although I make no claims to a comprehensive history of genre, nor do I intend to make a particular intervention in the problematics of genre, I will argue against dispensing with genre entirely, and try to adopt a pragmatically open, dynamic, and historical understanding of genre so as to accommodate new forms and material.

[72] Rick Altman, *Film/Genre* (London: British Film Institute, 1999), p. 1.

[73] Charles Dickens, *Bleak House*, Oxford World's Classics (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 14. Northrop Frye, whose own idiosyncratic and controversial schematics of genre did much to reinvent and transform the literary criticism of forms saw the problem of genre as being 'stuck precisely where Aristotle left it' and as a result the 'very word' is an 'unpronounceable and alien thing'. He warned that most 'critical efforts to handle such generic terms as "epic" and "novel" are chiefly interesting as examples of the psychology of rumor'. Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism*, p. 13.

[74] Sardonically introducing genre in a special MLA edition, *Remapping Genre* in 2007, John Frow, after a quick internet search finds that 'genre theory hangs out these days in the school classroom, in freshman composition, and in the world of gay fashion' Frow, John. 'Reproducibles, Rubrics, and Everything You Need': Genre Theory Today', *PMLA*, 122.5, Special Topic: Remapping Genre (October 2007), pp. 1626-1634, p. 1627. He notes that the focus on genre in the school and writing style guides concentrates on a limited idea of genre in which it is 'understood taxonomically, as a classification device with relatively fixed features'. Frow, 'Genre Theory Today', p. 1627. This fact, he notes, is in contrast to the 'decline' of genre 'as a vital issue in contemporary literary theory' where 'it's just not one of the topics about which interesting discussions are happening these days'. Frow, 'Genre Theory Today', p. 1627.

theory and practice', nevertheless he speaks of a paradoxical need for genre by literary critics.[75]

In situating the attacks both against and for a valiant and plausible defence of genre, Ralph Cohen cites three contentious areas where genre criticism has been discredited: 'the notion that texts compose classes […] the assumption that members of a genre share a common trait or traits […] the function of a genre as an interpretative guide'.[76] These issues can be further distilled into two basic underlying and problematic assumptions: 'that a given genre is a fixed entity and that it offers a set of criteria for texts'.[77] Underlying these concerns are specific and technical literary objections to genre and more fundamental philosophical and ideological problems. I would like to briefly consider some of these objections and problems before arguing for the use of epic genre albeit in a modified and qualified sense.

The most common recent critiques of literary genre frequently draw from the work of Benedetto Croce and Jacques Derrida.[78] Wai Chee Dimock cites both Croce and Derrida in her essay introducing genre as a field of knowledge for the MLA in 2007 in order to suggest the ossifying and programmatic preconceptions of a genre system which limits and categorises literature. She quotes Croce and Derrida:

> '[I]nstead of asking before a work of art if it be expressive and what it expresses', genre criticism only wants to label it, putting it into a pigeonhole, asking only 'if it obey the laws of epic or of tragedy'. […] Derrida makes the same point: 'As soon as genre announces itself, one must respect a norm, one must not cross a line of demarcation, one must not risk impurity, anomaly, or monstrosity'. Such border

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[75] Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (London: Methuen, 1983), p. 92.

[76] Ralph Cohen, 'History and Genre', *New Literary History*, 17.2, Interpretation and Culture (Winter 1986), pp. 203-218, p. 203. See several interventions over a long career as editor of New Literary History: Ralph Cohen, 'History and Genre', *New Literary History*, 17.2, Interpretation and Culture (Winter 1986), pp. 203-218; 'Introduction', *New Literary History*, 34.2 (Spring 2003), pp. iv-xiv; 'Introduction: Notes Toward a Generic Reconstitution of Literary Study', *New Literary History*, 34.3 (Summer 2003), pp. v-xvi.

[77] Adeline Johns-Putra, *The History of Epic* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), p. 3.

[78] Adeline Johns-Putra quotes Derrida's stark warning that genre imposes harsh sanctions when it cordons literature outside limits: 'genre "put[s] to death the very thing that it engenders"'. Johns-Putra, p. 3. Likewise, Bernadetto Croce has polemically stated that, 'All books dealing with classifications and systems of the arts could be burnt without any loss whatsoever'. Bernadetto Croce, qtd. in Adena Rosmarin, *The Power of Genre*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1985), p. 6.

> policing is an exercise in fluidity, he says, for the law of genre is an impossible law; it contains within itself a 'principle of contamination', so much so that the law is honoured only in its breach.[79]

The sting of these critiques is deconstructive, in the sense that they are sceptical that genres work to accurately map a literary field at all, but it also views genre as profoundly hostile to the true value and creative spirit of literature which by its very nature is rebellious, experimental and transgressive.[80]

In addition to analytical or logical critiques of genre, there are ideological and cultural concerns. Such critiques have the significant and essential corollary of exposing and unmasking the power dynamics implicit in the ideological shaping force of genre. Stephen Owen uses the highly charged rhetorical language of legality and policing to argue that there is a 'politics of genre' which is 'intensely territorial' so that '[i]f we attempt to define or describe a genre as such, we are engaging in an entirely different order of activity, one remarkably close to legislation or border control'.[81] And if genre represents a world bounded by walls and controls and checks, the danger and fear is of policing literary activity and replicating and entrenching geo-political power relations and knowledge systems. Bruce Robbins comments that, '[g]enre categories impose an onerous and misleading set of expectations on national literatures that are not European' forcing uneven competition in a global marketplace which leads to either marginalisation or homogenisation of forms whose values are 'defined by established European genres' putting 'newcomers at a systemic disadvantage'.[82] Genre classification, with its objectives of abstract order, control and a rational hierarchy located in influential metropolitan centres of power, is thoroughly deconstructed, and unthinking adherence to such a hierarchy of forms is seen as at best

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[79] Wai Chee Dimock, 'Introduction: Genres as Fields of Knowledge', *PMLA*, Special Topic: Remapping Genre, 122.5 (October 2007), pp. 1377–1388 (p. 1377). For Derrida, genre can be equated with repressive law and interdictions of norms, all which would reify literary multiplicity into reductive categories of genre and limit the endless interpretative and productive variety of texts. For a brief summary of this position see John Frow, *Genre* 2nd edn (London: Routledge, 2006), pp. 28-29. Here Frow notes that the force of this critique largely depends on an assumption of a principle of 'taxonomic purity' of genre. Frow, *Genre*, p. 28.

[80] Altman describes Croce's attack on genre as part of a wider project that 'sought to sweep away virtually all generalizing critical discourse' by revealing that 'attempts to prescribe the code of a genre are consistently defeated by poet's efforts to exceed or subvert that code'. Altman, p. 7.

[81] Stephen Owen, 'Genres in Motion', *PMLA*, Special Topic: Remapping Genre, 122.5 (October 2007), pp. 1389-1393 (p. 1389).

[82] Bruce Robbins, 'Afterword', *PMLA*, 122.5 (October 2007), pp. 1644-1651, p. 1646.

ineffectual, and at worst inimical to world literature in its swirling, manifold forms and which is encouraged by a cosmopolitan ethic of difference, mobility and freedom.

It is not my intention to make an unassailable case for genre or adopt a particular methodology that would determine absolute authoritative literary patterns and knowledge about epic. Nor is it within my ambit to explore in considered detail the finer complexities involved in such a defence. Nevertheless, I would like to offer a flexible use of genre, not as an essential and perfectible taxonomy of forms, but rather as a heuristic device and potential ground for comparison of three rather different twentieth century poets and poems.[83] As a guiding exploratory interpretive device without aspirations to definite knowledge and absolute authority this means that, 'once genre is defined as pragmatic rather than natural, as defined rather than found, and as used rather than described', then this type of genre criticism becomes an explanatory tool shedding light on potential affinities and readings between texts which retain their integrity, mystery and multiplicity.[84]

The second qualification is to accept the plurality of definitions of any given genre. The consensus amongst recent studies on epic seems to confirm that defining epic in any strict and determinist fashion is a forlorn and counterproductive task, especially if one hopes that a solid genre foundation might provide such a basis for certainty. Michael Bernstein begins his study of the modern verse epic with the admission that 'from any comparative historical survey' there is 'no one constellation of fixed attributes, no set of necessary and sufficient elements' which 'can be isolated' and 'that would allow us to determine by purely formal analysis whether or not a poem is an epic'.[85] Alastair Fowler has

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[83] As Adena Rosmarin has argued in a highly nuanced defence of the continued relevance of genre, rather than pursuing texts to find intrinsic characteristics and reifying them into eternal genre laws, the better (and more honest) approach is one which would use genre in a 'pragmatic and rhetorical' critical method:

> The critic's heuristic tool, his chosen or defined way of persuading his audience to see the literary text in all its previously inexplicable and 'literary' fullness and then to relate this text to those that are similar or, more precisely, to those that may be similarly explained.

Adena Rosmarin, *The Power of Genre* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985), p. 25.

[84] Rosmarin, p. 25.

[85] Michael André Bernstein, *The Tale of the Tribe: Ezra Pound and the Modern Verse Epic*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014). John McWilliams realises early on in his history of American epic from 1770 to 1860 that 'no precise meaning of "epic" can be found that will suit even those few texts that centuries of readers have agreed to call epics'. John P. McWilliams, *The American Epic: Transforming a Genre 1770-1860* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), p. 4. Johns-Putra, too, attempting an even broader history of epic when faced with the 'ubiquity and "efflorescence" of the "accumulation of definitions" of a genre like epic, argues that instead of throwing up our hands in despair over epic's apparent indeterminacy' we should accept and engage with it and give up 'searching for a single definition of epic'. Johns-Putra, p. 1.

been quoted as saying that, 'Genre is much less of a pigeonhole than a pigeon'.[86] Movement and flight are in their nature. Epic conventions shift and change through time as does the genre which is transformed with the alterations. The 'word "epic" describes a tradition founded, not only upon change, but conscious reshaping of its defining qualities'.[87]

The implication here may be unsettling, prone to fuzzy thinking and potentially vague, but it is also one of radical liberating openness, multiplicity and intersectional comparative forms. Genre is and genres are characterised by their 'unfinishability' which may be a 'systemic' but 'productive […] failing'.[88] To cease looking for a closed set, focussing on divisions, pure impermeable forms and definitions, and an 'exhaustive blueprint' where genres have 'solid names' that designate 'taxonomic classes of equal solidity' means genres are seen as 'fields at once emerging and ephemeral, defined over and over again by new entries that are still being produced'.[89]

For Dimock the epic is exemplary in this regard. She uses it to illustrate the ways in which genre supersedes and transforms itself and other genres in a relationship marked by permeability and porosity and exchange. Limits, whether they be aesthetic conventions or territorial are constantly drawn, altered and redrawn. As in Moretti's terms the epic is a world text and must be studied as a 'world-system'.[90] A history of epic should trace the 'history of cross-currents, of diffusion, interface, and embedding' with an emphasis on fluidity and multiplicity.[91] Of epic she writes that 'there is no better example of a genre that

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[86] Alastair Fowler, qtd. in Wai Chee Dimock, *Through Other Continents: American Literature Across Deep Time* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), p. 74.
[87] Mc Williams, p. 4.
[88] Dimock, 'Genres as Fields', p. 1377.
[89] Dimock, 'Genres as Fields', p. 1377, p. 1379. Orienting criticism within such an open field requires new and creative lenses or metaphoric modes of interpretation with which to conceptually organise relations between texts. Dimock has offered multiple possible frameworks or schemae: family resemblance, akin to a web of connections (kin and kind) which conceives genre as a network, web or series of affinities and similarities, not necessarily established through lineage or genealogy but rhizomic in its relationships and patterns which are 'multi-location, multi-platform, and multi-dimension'; fractal geometry which conceptualises the 'spinning of threads' as 'non-linear system, with structural entanglements at various angles and various distances, a complex geometry'; spirals and Mandelbrot's complex geometrical patterns to suggest loops and multi-scalar systems; and, finally, accommodating Moretti's 'comparative morphology' or a 'distributive map, reflecting the circulation and evolution of literary forms, and operating on the same scale as the planet'. Wai Chee Dimock, 'Genre as World System: Epic and Novel on Four Continents', *Narrative*, 14.1 (January 2006), pp. 85-101, p. 86, p. 87, p. 88, p. 90. Susan Stanford Friedman has done a similar type of re-conceptual variation for the definitions of modernity and modernism. See *Planetary Modernisms: Provocations on Modernity Across Time* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015).
[90] Dimock, 'Genres as Fields', p. 1383.
[91] Dimock, 'Genres as Fields', p. 1381.

spills over' and that its 'scope is intercontinental, its long evolution stretching from the third century BCE to the present moment'. Epic, with its 'endless capacity for locomotion and capillary action', offers a planetary and extensive view of collective human development that crosses borders, cultures and time zones.[92]

Until now I have been discussing the various theories of genre and epic as if they existed, if not in a vacuum of generic rules and laws, at least in an independent realm with its own history and development. This, however, would perpetuate a narrow idea of genre as merely a matter of classification, and to ignore a vital aspect of genre's worldliness. It further misunderstands the nature of epic as it has developed through time and in different contexts with varied social functions and purposes. Focusing on the historical and political aspects of genre reveals epic as more than simply a literary activity which is understood and analysed in purely aesthetic or reifying literary terms. Epic, like genre as a cultural practice of human forms, is implicated in history, and informed by material conditions. Any approach to epic must take into account the social, political and economic conditions in which it is performed, and written. As well as reflecting and being a product of these historical conditions, however, epic also shapes, remembers, preserves reconstitutes and reproduces certain forms of knowledge of history and is complicit in the transmission of cultural values, narratives and images.

In one respect this means that as John Frow has noted genre is embedded in the world of power and knowledge. Akin to a Foucauldian analysis of discourse, 'genres actively generate and shape knowledge of the world'.[93] Furthermore, genre when generalised to take into account social forms of speech (epic was originally a spoken form of ritualised oral activity) is connected with social institutions and social situations with cultural, ritual and religious meanings. It is perhaps worth noting that epic as it originated in an oral tradition carried a highly ritualised and circumscribed set of rules and conventions for which the poetic speech had essential social functions and cultural significances. This may seem a distant role for epic, far from the world of print and the modern literary system, and yet the idea of epic as a social public and ceremonial form of speech activity is perpetuated throughout all three modern epics in the figure of the epic bard.

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[92] Dimock, 'Genres as Fields', p. 1384.
[93] Frow, *Genres*, p. 2.

Previous ideas about epic may claim universality, and yet, in the process of shaping the material and form of epic, inevitably they become part of history. At the level of genre alone, characterised by a long memory and indebtedness to tradition, epic demands a 'long view'. The epic 'has from the first been preoccupied with its own genealogy' which enmeshes it in a 'double plot': 'partly about heroes' (or any variety of typical epic subject matter) and 'partly about its own durability, as a form'.[94] Obsessed with the generative principle of perpetuity, the lineage of inheritance and promise of immortality, writing within an epic genre forces a dual awareness of the past as source, with a duty to remember and respect tradition, and also the awareness of the present moment of creation or production which compels epicists from their peculiar and particular vantage dramatically to alter, rework, challenge and adapt the content and form of what constitutes an epic. Indeed, concentrating solely on a catalogue of formal epic criteria will only go so far in providing an understanding of epic at all. The epic has become more than a genre, but cognate with tradition itself. Amongst others, Brian Wilkie notes that epic 'is not and never has been a genre; it is a tradition'.[95] Downes writes that epic poets are extremely conscious of tradition, and that since 'the writer of epic is in a position like the oral poet's' the poet 'is required to re-create, re-member, as it were, the traditional narrative, the "tale of the tribe"'.[96] Epic is 'never part of an absolute past, but is always both the remaking of the tradition in light of the contingent present, and the remaking of the present in the light of tradition, exactly as it is in oral culture'.[97] By aligning the idea of epic so closely to the notion of tradition, there is an invocation of an Eliotic version of tradition that would see epic as imbued with a 'historical sense' or the 'perception, not only of the pastness of the past, but of its presence' imbued as a 'stable yet changing simultaneous existence and simultaneous order' in which the 'past should be altered by the present as much as the present is directed by the past'.[98]

Furthermore, the endurance of the epic through time depends on many, sometimes contradictory factors – both internal or formal, but more often than not, external and

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[94] Frederick T Griffiths and Stanley J. Rabinowitz, *Novel Epics: Gogol, Dostoevsky, and National Narrative* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1990), p. 7.
[95] Brian Wilkie, qtd. in Downes, p. 14.
[96] Downes, p. 14.
[97] Downes, p. 14.
[98] T. S. Eliot, 'Tradition and the Individual Talent', *Selected Prose of T. S. Eliot*, ed. by Frank Kermode (London: Faber and Faber, 1975), p. 38, p. 39. Eliot's presence will be found throughout this thesis especially given his arch-Modernist status, and also the great influence his poetics and cultural criticism played in shaping Crane, Jones and Walcott's work.

cultural.[99] For instance, if regarded as a conservative form, one quality assumed to have the most force in establishing and securing epic status, would be directly through acknowledgement and through an intertextual web of allusion and references. The 'seemingly compulsive imitativeness' of epic where the imitation devices, 'familiar store of props and scenes', function as the 'most dependable signs that a work is candidate for the epic category'.[100] In this view the central technique to validate and consolidate the authority of the epic is achieved through the epic's 'propensity for recursion'.[101] While I do not dismiss the validity of an approach that would spot and determine the family resemblances and connections between epics to establish a lineage, I would contest Wilkie's claim that 'imitation often seems to be an end in itself'.[102] I would rather underline the implications that imitation is neither neutral nor disengaged from context and cultural politics. An awareness of the dislocations of form is vital in an account of epic that would place epic in its social context. In fact, recognising 'recursion's important role in the internal workings of the epic'[103] at the same time as considering the generation of the epic tradition which encourages an awareness of conventions and formal changes also implicitly demands the possibilities for an external historicist reading of form to explain the changes. This is especially significant given the fact that recursion is never merely repetition. Recursion involves creative difference – differences which are driven often by external factors of

[99] Fowler notes that the change in form in the country house poem must in part be because of changing behaviour of hospitality, themselves presumably linked to social, economic and political changes: 'Surveying the new and the new-old genres of the renaissance period, one cannot but think that many of them arose from changed social circumstances. The estate poem (country-house poem) seems to have emerged in response to changes in the character of hospitality'. Alastair Fowler, 'Formation of Genres in the Renaissance and After', *New Literary History*, 34.2 (Spring 2003), pp. 185-200, p. 187.
[100] Wilkie, p. 14.
[101] Downes, p. 13. This stultifying pedantic formalism is exacerbated when the epic becomes embroiled in the '*Querelle des Anciens et des Modernes*' where epitomising the traditional past epic still had to find extraordinary means to regenerate and recuperate itself. The paradoxical desire to repeat and transform is evident when one considers that the achievement of epic status is conferred not solely by fulfilment of a set of criteria of an epic form. The simple fact that following epic conventions to the letter very rarely qualified an epic for success attests to the insufficiency of a singularly formalist approach in both the writing of and about epic. In the epic genre, then, rules and laws, even when esteemed as taxonomic and classificatory indicators of type, were in most regards an impingement and detrimental to epic success. This is as true in the seventeenth century as it is in the modernist period. Richie Roberston notes that there was an insecurity in the neoclassical application of a rigid and 'forbidding system of rules' modelled on Aristotelian poetic methodology which had the contrary effect on creativity in the epic genre: 'epics whose authors prided themselves on their correctness soon became by words for tedium'. Richie Robertson, *Mock-epic Poetry from Pope to Heine* (Oxford: Oxford, 2009), p. 16, p. 20.
[102] Wilkie, p. 14.
[103] Downes, p. 13.

cultural encounter, transfusion, translation interconnected with social, political and economic rupture and transformation. This dynamic is most apposite in Walcott's ambivalent use of Homeric allusion from both aesthetic and ethical points of view.

These observations not only illustrate fundamental features of the epic literary form but provide a proof of the need for a wider and broader understanding of cultural and historical influences which would shape the tradition.[104] It militates against any simplistic abstraction and reduction at the level of form and necessitates a complex and interrelated relationship between form, content and material conditions as they change through time – which, thereby justifies historical and comparative literary analysis. Furthermore, as we shall see in epic's intricate relationship with history, this dynamic is acutely important in any understanding of modern epic especially given its claims to be a genre which aspires towards cultural and historical expression and knowledge in a period repeatedly characterised by its dislocations, discontinuities and fragmentations. It is also vitally important given that the epic form is often used as a litmus test to indicate the conditions of a society; it is often the form about which critics are most likely to make assumptions of formal and material interrelationships when characterising the cultural and societal integrity of a given community or nation in history.

This means, as Franco Moretti argues, that awareness, compromise and flexibility is a methodological necessity between the impulses of the literary critic who would play formalist and sociologist. The critic must become a hybrid creature, a 'centaur critic' who is 'half formalist, to deal with the "how"; half sociologist to deal with the "why"' and continually seeking to negotiate and resolve the tension.[105] Moretti sees a potential resolution between formalist and sociologist 'if the sociologist accepts the idea that the social aspect of literature resides in its form, and that the form develops according to its

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[104] A concession: a possible reading of the recursive nature of epic can remain focused on formal internal literary features, the psychoanalytic framework exemplified by Harold Bloom is an example. However, even here, at some point one would still need to make appeals to extra-literary interpretations and assumptions, including for instance the autobiography of the poet perhaps, and at least some framework drawn from a complex relationship inferred between the poet and inherited figures. I prefer to deduce the need for external social conditions influencing the production of epic to explain and account for the shape and features of the epic. This allows us to see how literary traditions are constituted by contingent variables of place, community, period and ideology.

[105] Franco Moretti, *Modern Epic: The World System from Goethe to García Márquez*, trans. by Quintin Hoare (London: Verso, 1996), p. 6.

own laws' and if the formalist 'accepts the idea that literature follows great social changes – that it always "comes after"'.[106]

I argue that epic might best be flexibly considered as a mode, rather than solely a literary genre. The epic, especially for Pound and the modern writers 'was a question, a problem to be explored through specific texts, rather than an established poetic form with generally acknowledged set of conventions'.[107] By this I mean to show that the epic is a dialectical, reflexive and semi-autonomous form which is both a textual literary creation conforming to and often subverting generic codes and conventions, and a commentary and way of seeing and representing history and culture which also seeks to continually ask and re-ask the question of the validity of the epic form in its current space and time, even when it has been written off as impossible. More fundamentally, this means that the epic is both a poetic art object of literary nature (and to be analysed as such with all the tools of close analysis) and a historical and theoretical reaction to and exploration of modernity – or any society in any given time period. By virtue of its esteemed value as cultural product which attempts to map the totality of society and its demand to represent the sweep of history, the epic is necessarily implicated in ideological questions of cultural and political importance. As a mode, then, epic may be viewed as a problem and heuristic form of aesthetic-poetic thinking through the experience of history and modernity.

Like Jameson, who argues that the aesthetic act of production of form is ideologically overdetermined with the 'function of inventing imaginary or formal "solutions" to unresolvable social contradictions', Moretti too places a strong emphasis on the 'problem-solving vocation' of literature.[108] Here literary belatedness is not a mere repetition but an attempted resolution to the 'problems set by history'.[109] With 'every transformation' there are implicit 'ethical impediments, perceptual confusions, ideological contradictions' which he terms '*symbolic overload*' and which burdens subjects and threatens community. In a charitable and optimistic view, literature is palliative, redemptive and restorative. It 'helps reduce the tension' to 'make existence more comprehensible, and more

[106] Moretti, *Modern Epic*, p. 6.
[107] Bernstein, p. 11.
[108] Jameson, *Political Unconscious*, p. 64, Moretti, *Modern Epic*, p. 6.
[109] Moretti, *Modern Epic*, p. 6.

acceptable'.[110] Critics have to be wary of this redemptive reading.[111] Moretti, nuances this with the mindful addition that not only are modernity's confusions rendered understandable through literary work, but, more insidiously perhaps, so too are power relations and violence made acceptable. This view is evident in the work of Adorno: 'The unsolved antagonisms of reality return in artworks as immanent problems of form'.[112]

What are some of the characteristics that would constitute an epic? A list of the probable features of epic would be lengthy, and at some point, lead to contradictions and mutually exclusive criteria.[113] Here, ordered not chronologically but from the barest to fullest, are two definitions linked with characteristics often deemed as the determining qualities or requirements for entry into the epic genre. Wilkie offers the two most basic criteria: an epic is 'long' and is a 'narrative'.[114] *The Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics* states, 'An epic is a long narrative poem of heroic action'.[115] One can imagine further elaboration adding more detailed definitions that captures an increasing and evermore

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[110] Moretti, *Modern Epic*, p. 6.
[111] See Leo Bersani, *The Culture of Redemption* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1990).
[112] Theodor W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, ed. by Gretel Adorno and Rolf Tiedemann, trans. by Robert Hullot-Kentor (New York, Continuum, 1997), p. 6.
[113] Again, it is important to heed the warnings over the technical mechanics of genre raised by sceptics of genre. Objections raised by Derrida and others deconstruct the notion of individual belonging and classification into general categories, finally reducing the notion of genre to ambiguity, circularity and ambivalence. Cohen summarises Derrida's argument which 'affirms and denies genre' by noting that for Derrida 'any generic system is untenable because individual texts although participating in it cannot belong to it'. Cohen, 'History and Genre', p. 204. This state of 'belonging without belonging' is the case primarily because 'individual texts resist classification because they are interpretatively indeterminate' and because 'generic traits do not belong to genres'. Cohen, 'History and Genre', p. 204, p. 205. Genre's systemic weaknesses and limitations are rooted in its *ad hoc*, belated labelling which is often undone by the empirical variety and elusive creativity of literary activity which constantly produces fresh examples and new forms which combine and alter traditional genres and generic markers. An inflexible taxonomy of genre also claims to proceed through a certain logic which aspires to essential timeless *a priori* knowledge with predictive precision, when in fact its method is *a posteriori*, contingent, and always partial and unfinished, simply because literary production continues to disrupt and challenge forms as soon as they are proposed and formulated. Genre categorisation has often made errors, misidentifications, and is largely based on principles of inclusion and exclusion that would attempt some sort of coherent organisation and clarity of distinction. Far from a 'neat catalog of what exists and what is to come', Dimock characterises genres in reality and practice as messy (and futile) and a 'vexed attempt to deal with material that might or might not fit into that catalog'. Dimock, 'Genres as Field', p. 1378. Lastly, more often than not narrow definitions of a genre like epic, especially those which tend to be solely based on one methodology run the risk of entrapment in an enclosed, tautologous interpretative circle. Selected and selective definitions tend to produce and reproduce a set of specific texts which qualify for entry into a genre like epic but are determined by underlying aesthetic and ideological values implicit in the very criteria or characteristics deemed essential to the epic itself.
[114] Brian Wilkie, *Romantic Poets and Epic Tradition* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1965), p. 4.
[115] *The Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, ed. by Roland Greene (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012), p. 40.

intricate set of features. In their comparative and cross-cultural study *Epic Traditions in the Contemporary World*, the editors define:

> A poetic narrative of length and complexity that centers around deeds of significance to the community. These deeds are usually presented as deeds of grandeur or heroism, often narrated from within a verisimilitudinous frame of reference. […] The epic also has a peculiar and complex connection to national and local cultures: the inclusiveness of epic – the tendency of a given poem to present an encyclopedic account of the culture.[116]

E. M. W. Tillyard lists four requirements of an 'epic spirit' which encompass criteria both formal and related to subject matter. First, it must be of a 'high quality and of high seriousness'.[117] Second, it must exhibit 'amplitude, breadth, inclusiveness'.[118] Third, it should display a structural and artistic 'control commensurate with the amount included' such that there is a sense of the 'whole' and an 'insistence on rigorous control and predetermination'.[119] He includes an added 'corollary' to 'associate epic poetry with the largest human movements and solidest human institutions' which exudes a 'heroic impression'.[120] And, fourth and finally, the epic must be 'choric' so that the 'epic writer must express the feelings of a large group of people living in or near his own time' and that the

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[116] Margaret H. Beissinger, Jane Tylus and Susanne Wofford, 'Introduction', in *Epic Traditions in the Contemporary World: The Poetics of Community*, ed. by Margaret H. Beissinger, Jane Tylus and Susanne Wofford (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), p. 2. William Calin provides an even more exhaustive attempt at an epic inventory:

> [I]t is normally in verse, of some length, in the narrative mode, fictional but based on history or legend; […] [I]t treats on a grand scale a martial, heroic subject, manifests artistic coherence because it concentrates on a single central hero or event of national significance, contains stylised 'episodes,' and is grounded in the supernatural. […] [T]o adhere to the mode a poem ought to be a narrative, a good story well told; be based on history, the primary subject-matter 'real'; have a hero larger than life, treat martial feats; give a heroic impression' or 'epic awe'; manifest grandeur, largeness, high quality and seriousness, a sense of amplitude, breadth, inclusiveness, and general significance; testify to human achievement and the dignity of man; represent a 'choric voice,' a collective, community point of view; and, in strictly esthetic terms, be composed in the 'grand style,' benefit from the author's control, and perhaps use traditional stock motifs.

William Calin, qtd. in Masaki Mori, *Epic Grandeur: Toward a Comparative Poetics of the Epic* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997), p. 45.

[117] Tillyard, p. 46.

[118] Tillyard, p. 46.

[119] Tillyard, p. 47-48.

[120] Tillyard, p. 50.

essence of that feeling is 'what it was like to be alive at the time' and also include a 'multitude of men of whose most serious convictions and dear habits he is the mouthpiece'.[121]

As a convenient, pragmatic, and tentative definition, I subscribe to Pound's various broad definitions of epic as a 'tale of the tribe', which 'includes history', and which 'channels 'the voice of a nation through the mouth of one man'.[122] I will not take this definition to be prescriptive. Each epic I look at varies, contests and complicates these observations. Nevertheless, they are a close baseline useful for an assessment of modern epic.

## Modern Epic! Wanted: Dead or Alive!
## Or
## 'Epic is dead, long live epic'[123]

Having invoked the name and genre of epic, writers and critics find it to be an oddly paradoxical muse. Stern and foreboding, it is at once the voice of authority, demanding respect and promising monumental immortality; Janus-faced in temperament, it is also a fraught, fickle and mercurial muse, and the history of literature is littered with the ruins of epics, unreadable and yet fascinating.[124] The legacy of the epic conjures ideas of a glorious

[121] Tillyard, p. 51. Whilst these definitions are extremely useful in orienting this study, as I have argued to ascribe to strict taxonomic rules would not do justice to the works themselves. Taking the poems studied as examples vying for inclusion into these definitions of epic would be difficult, but not insurmountable. Consider *The Bridge* as a first example. Notwithstanding Crane's sexuality, *The Bridge* exhibits the high style, sublime rhetoric; it exemplifies the expansive breadth and amplitude and attempts the inclusion of the ancient into the modern everyday; and, the choric voice is expressed through the apostrophe to the structuring principle of the Brooklyn Bridge itself. There are however no heroes in the sense that Tillyard or Bowra may demand: no high born nobles, but in a modern inversion and typically American democratic liberal impulse the heroes are the explorers, Columbus, Powhatan, Rip Van Winkle, Walt Whitman, the unnamed hobos, sailors, city dwellers, burlesque dancers, and of course, the bridge itself and the city and landscapes of America.

[122] Ezra Pound, qtd in Catherine Davies, *Whitman's Queer Children: America's Homosexual Epics* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013), pp. 8-9.

[123] Quotation taken from Griffiths and Rabinowitz, p. 17.

[124] In his study of mock-epic Ritchie Robertson writes of the history of the declining prestige of epic from the seventeenth century and comments about scholarly studies of nineteenth century epic, in particular Stuart Curran's influential book on romanticism: 'When one reads a study like Curran's, and still more when one explores forgotten epics for oneself, one feels as though the ocean had retreated and exposed a lost continent littered with magnificent ruins. It may be tempting to say, as Reinhard Krüger does of the seventeenth-century French epic, that 'these texts now appear to us, in general, as silent or unintelligible and hence irritating textual monsters', which cannot possibly afford aesthetic pleasure'. Robertson, p. 28.

past perpetuated through a grand poetic tradition as a living embodiment of cultural achievement and continuity, and yet it has been consistently pronounced to be dead, eulogised as a moribund and archaic form, and to be sacrificed and buried, giving way to new genres or forms.

Indeed, from György Lukács to Carlos Fuentes, the genre's death knell has been rung repeatedly through the twentieth-century.[125] Robert Scholes and Robert Kellogg have declared that the epic poem 'is as dead as the dinosaur'.[126] J. B. Hainsworth opens his study *Idea of Epic* with a sombre retrospective lesson in humility, acknowledging that the 'genre died'; his critical duty is autopsy and archaeology.[127] Just as with the chastened epic bard's humility, which has become a rhetorical commonplace, so too has epic's eulogy seemingly become part of the very constitution of the epic itself. So much so that, as another 'identifying characteristic' of epic, it is considered to be 'long dead, indeed recurrently dead'.[128]

The oft-cited obituaries of the epic might invoke Alastair Fowler's dictum: 'Pronounce a genre dead if works related to it directly are no longer widely read, so that its forms have become unintelligible without scholarly effort'.[129] Needless to say such a stark requirement may pronounce many genres prematurely dead and leave many others gasping for literary life, especially if we were to measure their vital signs according to readership in a

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[125] At the time Carlos Fuentes was making an impassioned plea for literary freedom in defending Salman Rushdie's against his fatwa for his controversial novel *The Satanic Verses*. Interestingly, in doing so Fuentes perpetuates received commonplaces and rehearses via Mikhail Bakhtin the theory of the novel in opposition to epic. Thus, '[w]hen we all understood everything, the epic was possible. But not fiction. The novel is born from the very fact that we do not understand one another any longer, because unitary, orthodox language has broken down'. Carlos Fuentes, 'Words Apart', in *The Rushdie File*, ed. by Lisa Appignanesi and Sara Maitland (London: Fourth Estate, 1989), pp. 241-245, p. 243. As the unique and most vital response to the cosmopolitan complexity of the modern world with multiple and contested languages the novel (as opposed to the epic) is the 'privileged arena where languages' (and hence ideologies) 'in conflict can meet' so that the novel values dialogue and open conversation over an absolute truth or an 'absolute hold over history'. Fuentes, p. 241. It is not the laudable sentiment but the opposition which I deem problematic and which I would like to contest in this thesis. Fuentes characterises the novel as a secular and open space against an epic conceived of as a sacred text which is 'completed and an exclusive text' and which in Bakhtin's terms is 'monologic' rather than 'dialogic'. There is no reason to believe that there is no such open epic in the past and that the aspirations for the novel cannot be met in a modern epic.

[126] Robert Scholes and Robert Kellogg, *Nature of Narrative: (Revised and Expanded*) (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), p. 11.

[127] J. B. Hainsworth, *The Idea of Epic* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), p. viii.

[128] Griffiths and Rabinowitz, p. 12.

[129] Alastair Fowler, 'The Life and Death of Literary Forms', *New Literary History*, 2.2 (1971), pp. 199-216 (p. 209). For a critique of this view of genre, especially the underlying assumptions and rules of genre that Fowler's view implies, see David Fishelov, *Metaphors of Genre: The Role of Analogies in Genre Theory* (University Park, Pa.: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1993), pp. 25-35.

global marketplace or determine the epic's health in relation to the often highly specialised and changeable literary trends in academic scholarship and production. Determining the exact *time* of death is controversial, and despite suggesting or undermining the very certainty of such death(s) which seem to happen recurrently, critics continue to speculate on its last moments, especially as the foundation for a theory of literary genealogy. For the 'severe purist' the epic 'vanished millennia ago when literacy broke up the world of oral narrative'.[130] These critics or 'purists' hold on to a notion that the only true epic is an oral ancient form (Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, *Beowulf*). This distinction leads to a bifurcation of epic into sub-categories. Consider C. S. Lewis's famous distinction between 'primary' and 'secondary' epic.[131] As the *suis generis* form the 'primary epic' is sacrosanct. Every other work hence is derivative and a 'secondary epic'. Alastair Fowler describes it as follows: 'Primary epic is heroic, festal, oral, formulaic, public in delivery, and historical in subject; secondary epic is civilized, literary, private, stylistically elevated, and "sublime"'.[132] However, continued and manifold epic activity has forced some scholars to concede a later time of death: '[o]ccasionally advocates have petitioned for a Miltonic stay of execution into the eighteenth or early nineteenth century'.[133]

The persistence of the idea of the death of epic seems to rely on a strategy of continual deferral or constant adjustment of definitional limitations. This is, as Tucker describes it, an uncomfortable business. It leads to a foreshortened and falsified sense of the literary history of the epic in which 'evaluative judgements are required to police the scene' in order to explain and account for the 'overwhelming evidence' of 'works of conspicuously epic shape and aspiration' which 'have continued to appear, on nearly an annual basis, years after whatever generic expiration date the gazette of literary history has announced'.[134] Definitional wrangling over constitutive characteristics and conventions are commonly used as means of deliberating and sorting the true epic from the failed, which has the negative implication that the field is narrowed and genuinely experimental forms may be disregarded. Categorising or '[e]xplaining this teeming evidence away obliges the

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[130] Tucker, *Heroic Muse*, p. 4.
[131] See C. S. Lewis, 'Primary Epic: Technique and Subject', in *Parnassus Revisited: Modern Critical Essays on the Epic Tradition*, ed. by Anthony C. Yu (Chicago: American Library Association, 1973), pp. 29-41.
[132] Fowler, Alastair, *Kinds of Literature: An Introduction to the Theory of Genres and Modes* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982), p. 160.
[133] Tucker, *Heroic Muse*, p. 4.
[134] Tucker, *Heroic Muse*, p. 5.

historian to turn critic' and to impose potentially constricted evaluative hierarchies, inclusions and exclusions which obscure and eliminate whole periods and writers of epic poetry. On this basis, with an unenviable method the critic:

> round[s] up the intruding senile delinquents and convict[s] them of failing to observe the clearly posted criteria, or, by a less contestable, more candidly authoritarian indictment – of lacking the epic genre's authentic character or spirit, which *ex hypothesi* has passed away beyond human recovery.[135]

Determining the supposed *cause* of the death of the epic is just as elusive and controversial. Most often the aetiology takes the form of an external factor (as opposed to only the mere decay and senescence of intrinsic nature of epic genre). Proud victors or culprits (depending on your sympathies) are responsible for the epic's demise, and these have varied throughout literary history:

> [in] our era it is the novel that has killed it, just as in earlier times it was done by philosophy (so declared Plato, extruding Homer from the Republic), by tragedy (in Aristotle's diagnosis in the *Poetics*), by confessional literature (so Augustine, turning from Dido in his *Confessions*), and then by romance (for example, Ariosto – but perhaps this was the same death that epic had died with Apollonius Rhodius almost two millennia before or in the somewhat later Greek romances).[136]

Whatever the time or cause involved in its downfall, the epic has become the scapegoat and sacrificial 'victim of choice for the currently dominant literary form'.[137] In many narratives of literary history, the epic must die for another form to live or flourish. This, however, is not wholly a matter of generic supersession, and, as with theories of epic discussed below, some of the most forceful cases against the epic diagnose wider cultural and historical factors responsible for the terminal decline of the epic literary form. This is keenly significant when the epic faces its most bitter adversarial foe: modernity. Directly relevant

[135] Tucker, *Heroic Muse*, p. 5.
[136] Griffiths and Rabinowitz, p. 12.
[137] Griffiths and Rabinowitz, p. 12.

to this study will be the line of critique starting with Hegel and moving through to the most prevalent and prominent proponents, György Lukács and Mikhail Bakhtin. At this moment it will suffice to mention that whatever the social transformation highlighted as constitutive to modernisation and proposed as the *coup de grâce* to the epic – be it the shift away from an aristocratic martial ideal and the feudal system which had previously encouraged a heroic vision based on an elite social and patriarchal hierarchy, or the decline of religion, or rise of science and reason, or emergence of an urbane bourgeois individualism – from an intricate and entangled mesh of complex, correlated structural conditions, one, or several, are abstracted and determined to be the underlying causes. In the eighteenth-century Horace Walpole would lament that epic 'is not suited to an improved and polished state of things'.[138] Thomas Blackwell argued that modern life was not conducive for an epic as an epic, based on the fact that manners and habits of primitive society requires the 'marvellous' which was impossible in a 'well-ordered state'.[139]

To a certain extent this means that continued writing of the epic has come to be regarded suspiciously as strangely archaic and anachronistic, or potentially tainted with nostalgia, and even a retrograde cultural and aesthetic politics. Consequently, any discussion of what might constitute a modern epic needs to be cognisant of the reasons and rationale for such pronouncements of its death, and its continued vestigial survival, or spectral presence. In order to acknowledge the continuities and discontinuities of epic throughout the twentieth century which can account for the transformations of the form, a double perspective is needed: an acceptance of the obvious changes in the literary and wider cultural landscape which has altered the context in which epic is produced and read, but also, a critical and cautious view which would cast doubt over the deathly pall which would mummify epic and entomb it in a generic fixity.

The situation, however, is made even more complicated and confusing by the opposite and concurrent trend in critical scholarship that attempts to redress this negative view and which celebrates and downplays any wariness over the epic's viability. (It would put the matter to rest if it was generally accepted that epic was in fact well and truly dead.) Such ambivalence means that for every confident dismissal of the epic there is an equally

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[138] Walpole, qtd. in Harry Levin, *Contexts of Criticism* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1957), p. 46.
[139] Thomas Blackwell, qtd. in Dustin Griffin, 'Milton and the Decline of Epic in the Eighteenth Century' *New Literary History*, 14.1, Problems of Literary Theory (Autumn 1982), pp. 143-154, p. 144.

ebullient validation of the genre's longevity and durability. *The Cambridge Companion to the Epic* which attempts to survey the long scope of the genre in order to accommodate the classical and the modern, the traditional and the contemporary, has a preface which begins with the overwhelmingly positive, and yet by no means automatically accepted statement:

> The endurance of the epic tradition is an extraordinary literary phenomenon: a form of writing that has recognizably survived – for all the hazardous vicissitudes of transmission and in spite of historical changes themselves of historical proportions – from Gilgamesh, which dates back to the second millennium BC, to *Omeros*, which won its author the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1992. Nor does epic as a genre show any signs of decay, for it is constantly being updated and revived for a modern audience, a flood of new, often celebrated, translations making the texts newly available and accessible to a general readership, while cinematic remakes and the perpetuation of epic motifs in contemporary blockbusters and computer games ensure that the form remains ever present in the popular consciousness.[140]

The epic, despite all attendant futility and hubris, has been attempted in various forms and by a variety of writers regardless of its challenge and apparent moribund status. Indeed, Tennyson would compose a poem about Arthur of epic description and creatively engage with the form in new ways. As would Pound, whose *Cantos* is accepted, tentatively as always with these matters, to be a modern epic. Along with others, Tucker's study is testament to the ongoing activity in the epic mode which is suggestive of both the durability and elasticity or adaptability of the form.[141] In this view, then, the epic appears more like a stubborn form which refuses to die or go away. From 'epoch to epoch the form comes unexpectedly alive only to find another consummation and die yet another final death'.[142] The presence of the epic persists to become part of the complex process of the formation

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[140] Catherine Bates, 'Preface', in *The Cambridge Companion to the Epic*, ed. by Catherine Bates (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), p. ix.

[141] For studies of eighteenth to nineteenth century epic relevant to this study see also: Edward Adams, *Liberal Epic: The Victorian Practice of History from Gibbon to Churchill* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2011); Simon Dentith, *Epic and Empire in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006); Thomas A. Vogler, *Preludes to Vision: The Epic Venture in Blake, Wordsworth, Keats, and Hart Crane* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971); Brian Wilkie, *Romantic Poets and Epic Tradition* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1965).

[142] Griffiths and Rabinowitz, p. 15.

and continuance of a tradition or a canon – and, which, carrying the burden or weight of the past, implicates modern writers in the often-difficult negotiation of allegiances, influences and debts. Epic, which is often closely equated with the prestige and cultural authority of an originary or foundational quality is omnipresent:

> [h]aving survived the advent of writing and then of printing, epic as a process of tradition forming and cultural centering is more resilient […] it must survive each transition by a kind of 'grandfather clause,' a bemused toleration of it as a living anachronism.[143]

The modern artistic engagement with epic has been typified by the willing and unwilling stresses that the creative opportunity of influence offers, and critical appreciation of these works has suffered less from the difficultly of clear and accurate classification than the argument over whether the genre is fixed and dead or flexible and living. It has meant that the genre is seemingly simultaneously impossible and possible at the same time. It has been both written off, thrown into the dustbin of literary history and renewed in new forms and fresh examples. This has led to the epic subsisting in what Ritchie Robertson has called a peculiar and somewhat paradoxical death-in-life condition:

> Although the epic did not die, it entered a paradoxical mode of existence. It retained immense cultural prestige, yet few actual specimens remained popular for long. Rather than declining, the epic remained in stasis.[144]

This may be only to settle on a truism, a generalisation for many aspects of literary and cultural practice which change according to developments in styles, alterations in taste and modification of historical conditions. Nevertheless, perhaps because of the inextricable link

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[143] Griffiths and Rabinowitz, p. 14-15. Rabinowitz and Griffiths make the bold claim that rather than the novel outliving the epic, they predict that 'it is much more likely the novel' which 'will end in the graveyard of epic's other destroyers' (to which they refer to theatre, film, and to which we may cautiously add television series, and even computer and virtual games). Griffiths and Rabinowitz, p. 14-15.

[144] Robertson, p. 29. Raúl Marrero-Fente has described this persistence of epic and the continual attempt to supress or kill it in terms of 'ghost theory'. He has also noted that the 'neglect' and 'exclusion' of the epic is a serious problem in postcolonial studies of early modern epic. Raúl Marrero-Fente, *Epic, Empire, and Community in the Atlantic World* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2008), p. 17.

between the formal and cultural, and the burden of the demands placed on the epic, there is often an anxious and sheepish rhetoric in both writers and critics. This is often reflected in their consternation and reluctance, as well as over exuberance to attempt such a foolhardy work as an epic or label a work an epic. It would not be an overstatement to wonder if it were obligatory, depending on one's position on the matter, to lament or rejoice in the genre's demise only for another iteration to resurrect itself and give the epic new life, or else for some other form to reanimate it in the form of some monstrous hybrid, thereby confusing generic matters further.

This desire to prove the resilience and persistence of the epic results in at least two critical responses which have their own unintended consequences: one (problematic) is a modern appropriation of unique and privileged creative return where the modern epic is afforded special and exemplary status, what Herbert Tucker calls a 'revivalist movement' which 'subscribes to a heterodox exceptionalism'.[145] Second, (less problematic but perhaps reflecting a general diversion away from poetry in popular culture), is that the epic migrates and is relocated under the auspices of another genre, most notably of course the novel, but also as significant recent studies have shown in cinema.[146] Both of these trends in part describe a feature of modernism from its innovative and experimental aims to the obvious cultural ascendancy and ubiquity of the novel. However, to focus solely on these factors in any assessment of a modern epic risks losing sight of the continuity of epic, as well as its creative reaction to the possibilities of hybridisation, whilst still refusing to surrender to the novel.

More seriously in the opposite direction, however, the epic has found itself quarantined in the critical discussion as an archaism and an outmoded form which leaves any writing which hearkens to epic form or status in a deeply compromised position. In

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[145] Tucker, *Heroic Muse*, p. 5. Resentfully staking a case in an inter-period internecine warfare, Tucker bitterly complains that this mistaken narrative 'privileges' the brief life of a twentieth century modernism over the longer 'half-millennium of modernity' and arrogantly arrogates a sense of exceptional creativity for modernisms as 'unprecedented maker-new of all things'. Tucker, *Heroic Muse*, pp. 5-6.

[146] See Joanna Paul's book *Film and the Classical Epic Tradition* and her discussion of the mixed responses including some guarded and tentative and others more enthusiastic allowances for and acknowledgement of the evolution and development of the literary epic into film. Paul, pp. 29-32. See also J. B. Hainsworth, *The Idea of Epic*, pp. 148-149; Paul Innes, *Epic*, p. 155-156; Paul Merchant, *The Epic*, p. 4. David Quint explores Sergei Eisenstein's work as epic, in *Epic and Empire*, p 361-368. Other recent works on epic and cinema include Elley, Derek. *The Epic Film: Myth and History*. London: Routledge, 2013 and Andrew Elliott. *The Return of the Epic Film: Genre, Aesthetics and History in the 21st Century*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014.

attempting to discuss a work as epic, the critic finds herself in an invidious position fighting on several conceptual fronts concurrently: the generic battle of categorisation between competing (and equally unstable) genres and forms (most often the novel, but also the lyric or tragedy); the internal struggle to delineate characteristics and features of the work appropriate or not to the epic genre; and an ongoing strategic negotiation with other competing master concepts, especially modernity and colonialism/post-colonialism which all but preclude epic from their lexicon unless prefixed by a 'post' or an ironic and intentionally paradoxical or oxymoronic construction 'modern' or 'anti'. Caught between multiple fragmented discourses and its place usurped by the novel, many studies questioning the dynamics of nationalism, cosmopolitanism and globalisation in literary practice are focused through the lens of the novel, whilst the epic, an unwieldy oddity seems to be more happily addressed by classical scholars in their efforts to widen and re-evaluate the after-effects of the genre on succeeding works and in different cultures.[147] So often branded archaic and judged to be superseded by its immediate and more popular form the novel, the epic becomes further embroiled in often justified reactionary cultural politics which associates the genre with problematic notions of masculinity, Western canon formation and questionably outmoded ethical and value systems.

Finally, underlying these critical assessments of the epic is an even more pervasive and difficult thicket of assumptions to do with a controlling recurrence of a conceptual schema of totality and unity. The concept of unity is manifested at the level of the aesthetic

[147] The range of critical studies which take the novel or poetry in general as a starting point is of course dizzying but relevant to this study (i.e. the ones which provoke the immediate thoughts: Why is epic, in poetic form at least, not considered here? Wouldn't this be useful for an engagement with modern epic poems?) and related to the fields or post-colonial studies and modernism are David Adams, *Colonial Odysseys: Empire and Epic in the Modernist Novel* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003); Nicholas Brown, *Utopian Generations: The Political Horizon of Twentieth-Century Literature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005); Jed Esty, *A Shrinking Island: Modernism and National Culture in England* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004; Paul Stasi, *Modernism, Imperialism, and the Historical Sense* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012). For useful studies referred to in this thesis which explore the creative engagement with classical literature especially from post-colonial contexts see *Epic Traditions in the Contemporary World: The Poetics of Community*, ed. by Margaret H. Beissinger, Jane Tylus and Susanne Wofford (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999); Leah Culligan Flack, *Modernism and Homer: The Odysseys of H.D., James Joyce, Osip Mandelstam, and Ezra Pound* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015); *Crossroads in the Black Aegean: Oedipus, Antigone, and Dramas of the African Diaspora*, ed. by Barbara E. Goff and Michael Simpson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007); *Homer in the Twentieth Century: Between World Literature and the Western Canon*, ed. by Barbara Graziosi and Emily Greenwood (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010); Emily Greenwood, *Afro-Greeks: Dialogues between Anglophone Caribbean Literature and Classics in the Twentieth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010); and, *Classics in Post-Colonial Worlds*, ed. by Lorna Hardwick and Carol Gillespie (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

and totality at the level of the social or cultural. These two are inextricably connected. In one respect, as Tucker has observed '[m]odern thinking about the epic genre exhibits remarkable stability' and an enduring coherence.[148] This is not due to any incontrovertible correctness about genre. Rather, charging modern critics of a misidentification and equivocation, and even a form of presentism, Tucker argues that the 'problem' the critics 'perennially addresses is not the essence of epic but the accidence of modernity'.[149] Entwined in this modern reading of epic is the 'replacement of a formal by a cultural criterion for epic unity'.[150] The correlation of modernity with complexity and the pre-modern epic world with simplicity, or, put in other terms with modern heterogeneity and epic monologism. This also implies a subtle developmental logic applied to the idea of epic which would render it a primitive form of a less developed age.[151]

There is, however, an alternative narrative which would avoid the 'drastic historical severance' from the 'genre's continuous tradition' in the nineteenth century during which epic continued to be written in diverse and experimental forms.[152] By tracing and acknowledging, but also resisting and adjusting, the assumptions perpetuated by modern theorists of epic such as Hegel, Lukács, and Bakhtin which would dismiss the form, one can challenge the idea that the epic is totally obsolete. Far from being an 'antiquated' and 'completed genre, with a hardened and no longer flexible skeleton', the epic is a living form.[153] Indeed, Moretti is more accurate in his assessment of the modern epic which he claims has a more nuanced and interesting 'afterlife' in that it is more able to successfully map the 'heterogeneous space of the world system'.[154] What follows is a summary of the major theorists of epic and a brief suggestion of points of contact and divergence with the epics treated in the thesis.

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[148] Tucker, *Heroic Muse*, p. 13.
[149] Tucker, *Heroic Muse*, p. 13.
[150] Tucker, *Heroic Muse*, p. 13.
[151] See Dentith's argument, *Epic and Empire*, pp. 4-13. When mapped onto a global terrain, or considered spatially, the epic only produced in certain developmental stages of a culture or society's development is a signal of its particular stage of progress. From the vantage point of a modernisation thesis the epic is always regressive or atavistic. Furthermore, when this is entwined in a modernity justifying and legitimating a colonial expansion we come to understand postcolonial writer's reluctance to use epic, and ironically, modernist writer's attraction towards the primitivism as antidote to the malaise of modernity.
[152] Tucker, *Heroic Muse*, p. 6.
[153] Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, trans by Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist, ed. by Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), p. 3.
[154] Moretti, *Modern Epic*, p. 57.

**Modern Epic Theories or 'Why the Epic had to Die': Hegel, Lukács, and Bakhtin**

The idea of modern epic as an anachronism is founded on a particular reading of epic in which the aesthetic form expresses a cultural and social, even historical unity which modernity has destroyed. If the shift towards an increasingly complex and instrumentalised late modernity is characterised by a breakdown of traditional social forms, then the epic, as it has been construed by such theorists, becomes an impossibly antiquated and anachronistic form. The values of epic, heroism, individual action, and an immanent frame or social imaginary,[155] are rendered redundant. This view, one which Hart Crane challenges in *The Bridge* but that David Jones shares with in *The Anathemata*, is encapsulated by the often-cited rejections of epic in the modern age by Hegel and Marx respectively:

> […] our present-day machinery and factories together with the products they turn out [are] out of tune with the background of life which the original epic requires.[156]

And,

> Is Achilles possible with powder and lead? Or the *Iliad* with the printing press, not to mention the printing machine? Do not the song and saga and the muse necessarily come to an end with the printer's bar, hence do not the necessary conditions for epic poetry vanish?[157]

Drawn from his *Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art*, Hegel's ideas about what constitutes an epic and its fate have become the ground for later critiques of epic. He introduces core concepts which will recur in modern discussions about epic: nationalism, dialectical ideas of epic as exemplary of stages in social progress, and the totality of epic. Hegel argues that the epic characterises a particular transitional stage in the development of society. The catalyst

[155] Charles Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2004).
[156] Karl Marx, qtd. in Jameson, *Political Unconscious*, p.133.
[157] Marx, qtd. in Dentith, *Epic and Empire*, p. 1.

for the epic may be war, the 'situation most suited to epic',[158] which poses severe existential threat and spurs a nascent self-recognition and need for the solidification of communal values and identity. In victory (or defeat), the epic provides the rationale or justification for the emergence or seeds for the foundation and survival of a community after the crucible of conflict. Epic implicitly has its origins in the processes of national and imperial expansion and the validation of cultural cohesion.

At first glance, such a portrayal of epic seems to have resonance with the three modern epics – at least if we patiently wait for belated places to catch up to Hegelian World History. Hart Crane wrote his American epic at a time of American emergent global dominance and cultural renascence and he consciously, but not uncritically, tries to capture a quality of exhilarating potential in a project of national self-definition.[159] Jones's epic quest for a cultural heritage was intensified after the destruction of two world wars.[160] Walcott appropriates and revels in this nascent and original quality of epic writing as he expresses the nature of St. Lucian society for the first time in its independent national history. This process, achieved through poetry and not the novel, however, is not straightforward anti-colonial nationalism.[161] While Walcott is opposed to the reductive imperial discourses of colonial history and he strongly critiques the Hegelian type of dismissal of Africa and the

[158] Hegel, qtd. in Mori, p. 14. One of the most common conventions of the epic concerns the representation of war. Not of absolute concern in this thesis which concerns the cultural politics of epic and the aesthetic representations of history and place in general, nevertheless all three poems are indeed concerned with war and in a more general way, violence. *The Bridge* is written in the aftermath of World War One (Crane tried to enlist but was rejected) partially as a response to 'The Waste Land', itself an elegy to the fallen. For Jones, a veteran and longest serving war poet, World War One was the subject of his first work *In Parenthesis*. *The Anathemata*, whilst not directly concerned with war is written in the midst of the Battle of Britain. Both wars had a traumatic effect on Jones, especially the total war on a scale foreshadowed by trench warfare but which reached its terrifying pinnacle in the aerial bombing and sheer scale of the Second World War. The two texts are inextricably linked by conflict. Not wanting to write specifically an epic about war, Jones also eschews the theme of love. His *Anathemata* is an epic of cultural heritage and preservation. Walcott's previous denials of epic on the basis that there is no central battle or war is belied by the fact that there are many various wars alluded to: the historical colonial wars over St. Lucia and Plunkett's historical exploration of these wars; Plunkett's service in the Second World War; and, the genocide and evisceration of Aruac and Native American tribes. War is very much a part of *Omeros*, as it is manifest in the colonial structures of violence and oppression which relied on the slave trade.

[159] Hegel saw America as the most likely possibility for the newest epic form.

[160] Paul K. Saint-Amour, *Tense Future: Modernism, Total War, Encyclopedic Form* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), p. 214.

[161] It is fair to say the most common literary form chosen by writers and analysed by scholars to exemplify this stage in national literary development is the novel. Whether in realist or magical-realist form, the novel, has assumed the role of de facto expressive medium of the age.

Caribbean as places without history, he nonetheless crafts a unique modern epic to express contemporary aesthetic and ethical dilemmas.

Hegel tied the epic inextricably to the rise of the state or the nation, which in a paradoxical moment provides the epic's rationale and inevitably its demise. Underlying this is Hegel's stadial[162] theory of dialectical historical progression, in which the epic is a liminal or developmental stage between primitive and modern. Hegel conceives of epic in developmental terms conflating the categories of consciousness, subjectivity and a national *Bildung* where the epic represents a 'childlike consciousness of a people' which is 'expressed for the first time in poetic form' raising a primitive consciousness into a higher one.[163] Epic belongs to a spontaneous and uncritical age when cultures and individuals within them were unified in sensibility and their values assumed an intimacy or a 'living attitude of mind'.[164] Hegel gives the epic a specific place in the dialectical narrative unfolding of a people's awakening where the epic is a catalysing figure.[165] The epic, which is enshrined as sacred text, an 'epic bible', one of the 'absolutely earliest books which express […] original spirit', represents an awakening and spiritual act of monumental cultural affirmation: 'these memorials are nothing less that the proper foundations of a national consciousness'.[166] The goal of the epic is to narrate events of heroic action which is also the totality of a unified expression of the age. The 'content and form of epic proper is the entire world-outlook and objective manifestation of a national spirit presented in its self-objectifying shape as an actual event'.[167] Hegel's ideas about epic were drawn primarily from his reading of Homer,[168] and it influences his ideas of epic characteristics, and also his correlation of epic with a common culture with immanent ethical values and virtues to which the poet has a privileged relation. In most readings of Hegel,[169] the epic is sloughed off in the course of the

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[162] The term is Charles Taylor's. See 'The Truth?' Berkley Center for Religion, Peace & World Affairs, Georgetown University https://berkleycenter.georgetown.edu/posts/the-truth [accessed 26 September 2017]
[163] G. W. F. Hegel, *Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art, Vol 2*, trans. by T. M. Knox. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), p. 1045.
[164] Hegel, p. 1045.
[165] There is a degree of circular logic here: to have produced the epic, they must have attained a degree of self-consciousness which itself requires a host of other unspoken conditions and factors, including highly structured and hierarchical communities, literary modes such as orality, and a defining concept of tradition and transmission.
[166] Hegel, p. 1045.
[167] Hegel, p. 1045.
[168] Mori, p. 33.
[169] For a nuanced reading which attempts to recuperate modern epic by locating its source in the very conditions which Hegel dismisses the form see: David James, *Art, Myth and Society in Hegel's Aesthetics*

development of the state and modern institutions which are incompatible with individual heroism and objectify values in the statutes of law. Primitive as it is, moderns can enjoy the epic, but at a distance and with a critical consciousness.[170] Other more germane modes of expression more suited to the age of the individual and organised state life supersede the epic: the lyric, the drama, and the novel.

For Lukács, Hegel provided the socio-historical rationale for the decline of epic in the modern world, and in turn provided the impetus for his theory of the novel. In Lukacs's account, the notion of totality[171] is the central feature of epic success; and, as a consequence of modernity, the sign of impossibility for the novel to attain holistic expression of social, economic and political relations. In the evolution or survival of literary forms, 'both the epic and the novel strive to attain the totality of life, but only the epic succeeds in accomplishing this task'.[172] Since in modernity this totality is impossible to represent, the epic must necessarily falter, and from this stems the idea of modern epic as a 'splendid failure'.

If Lukács continues the socio-historical analysis of epic, he also introduces an existential aspect inflecting his analysis with a line of argument almost identical to the

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(London: Continuum, 2009), pp. 89-101; and, David James, From the Age of Heroes to the Prose of Everyday Life: Hegel on the Differences between the Original and the Modern Epic', *History of European Ideas*, 32.2 (2006), pp. 190-204.

[170] Hegel writes:

> For an epic lives and is always new only if it continuously presents primitive life and work in a primitive way. Therefore, we must keep to the primitive epics and disentangle ourselves not only from views antagonistic to them and current in our actual present but also, and above all, from false aesthetic theories and claims, if we wish to study and enjoy the original outlook of peoples, this great natural history of the spirit. We may congratulate recent times, and our German nation in particular, on attaining this end by breaking down the old limitations of the scientific intellect, and, by freeing the spirit from restricted views, making it receptive of such outlooks. Hegel, p. 1077.

In this gesture of fascination with the primitive, but only at a safe distance, Hegel inaugurates what will become a distinguishing characteristic of the epic in the modern era, archaic distance, and primitivism in relation to a modern gaze. The aesthetic pleasure in epic, however, is implicated in an ideological judgement – one which will be enacted in the encounter with 'primitives' and 'primitive cultures' throughout the nineteenth century imperial endeavour. The epic, like the cultures who are still in the 'torpid' stage of emerging self-development, are previous versions of modern rational subjects. The epic can be secretly enjoyed, but must be kept safely at a distance or sublimated into antiquarian myths of national origins. Most of all, enjoyment in the epic must confirm and affirm German national superiority and national achievement.

[171] For an exhaustive account of the centrality and development of the concept in Western and especially Marxist thought see, Martin Jay, *Marxism and Totality: The Adventures of a Concept from Lukács to Habermas* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984).

[172] Galin Tihanov, *The Master and the Slave: Lukács, Bakhtin, and the Ideas of their Time* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000), p. 115.

standard disenchantment or secularisation thesis.[173] When he suggests that the novel is the mode most suited to modernity, it is because the epic expresses an age of fulfilment and wonder that modernity has destroyed. 'Happy', is the epic age whose 'starry sky is the map of all possible paths – ages whose paths are illuminated by the light of the stars'.[174] The epic world is one in which everything is 'new and yet familiar, full of adventure and yet their own' – it is a world which is 'wide and yet it is like a home'.[175] The epic world is whole and complete: it 'finds a centre of its own and draws a closed circumference round itself'.[176] Belonging to a pre-philosophical age, the epic expresses the 'transcendental topography of the mind, that topography whose nature and consequences can certainly be described, whose metaphysical significance can be interpreted and grasped'.[177] It is the philosophical and material nature of modernity to destroy this world of enchantment and certainty; Lukács invokes Novalis, '[p]hilosophy is really homesickness, it is the urge to be at home everywhere'.[178] Caught between the ruptures of modernity, Lukacs theorises the novel as the 'epic of an age in which the extensive totality of life is no longer directly given, in which the immanence of meaning in life has become a problem, yet which still thinks in terms of totality'.[179]

Lukacs's dichotomy between epic and the novel serves to present the epic and any epic-like work in a negative relation to modernity. However, his schema is not without its problems. His ideas on the epic are so connected to his theorisation of the novel as an emergent form in capitalist modernity so as to create a straw man of epic against which the novel wins out as the dominant form. Concentrating as it does on a philosophical and quasi-socio-historical understanding of epic, he misreads the aesthetic complexities of epic dismissing it too quickly. 'Bereft of any specific historical detail in social, technological or

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[173] Cascardi puts it succinctly, 'Lukács understands the rise of the novel in relation to the decline of great epic literature as a form of secularization and, in this respect, as not unrelated to the secularization process that Weber described in terms of the "disenchantment" of the world'. Anthony Cascardi, *The Subject of Modernity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), p. 95.

[174] Georg Lukács, *The Theory of the Novel: A Historico-Philosophical Essay on the Forms of Great Epic Literature*, trans. by Anna Bostok (London: Merlin Press, 1971), p. 29.

[175] Lukács, p. 29.

[176] Lukács, p. 29.

[177] Lukács, p. 31.

[178] Lukács, p. 29.

[179] Lukács, p. 56.

economic terms',[180] the distinction also rests on an idealisation of the pre-modern age. Nevertheless, his ideas about totality and form have been influential in entrenching the paradoxical relationship between the novel and the world it aspires to represent. Since it is impossible to represent modernity in totality, an aesthetic of fragmentary, partial and subjective form is the only possible expression of such a relationship. The options for the artist are either to 'narrow down and volatise whatever has to be given form to the point where they can encompass it' or 'they must show polemically the impossibility of achieving their necessary object and the inner nullity of their own means'.[181]

Mikhail Bakhtin builds on the association of epic and novel with nationalism and extends the dichotomy between the two modes, elaborating it into further distinctions between centripetal and centrifugal modes of language and power. Bakhtin's critique can be broken down into three central areas of concern all of which revolve around the problem that the epic is a monologic discourse – that is a dominating and oppressive discourse which seeks to propagate a restrictive unified single voice, style, official language of fixed meaning and reflecting the values of a totalising nation-state.[182] Epics concern themselves with: first, a national past as subject of the epic; second, a national tradition as source of the epic; and, third, an absolute epic distance which separates the epic world from the contemporary reality.[183] For Bakthin the epic is condemned as it draws on an idealised, partisan and selective past in which a homogenising national myth is preserved and ennobled. Fundamentally cut off from the living present, this past 'is the single source and beginning of everything good for all later times as well'.[184] As a 'world of "beginnings" and "peak times", a world of "firsts" and "bests"', the epic past and tradition is deterministic and closed as it is foundational, linear and teleological or eschatological.[185] It is reliant on an 'impersonal and sacrosanct' national tradition which itself demands a 'pious attitude towards itself'.[186]

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[180] David Cunningham, 'Capitalist Epics: Abstraction, Totality and the Theory of the Novel', *Radical Philosophy*, 163 (September-October 2010), pp. 11-23 (p. 12).
[181] Lukács, pp. 38-39.
[182] See David Lodge's neat definition: monologic genres are those which 'seek to establish a single style, a single voice, with which to express a single world-view'. Qtd. in Colin Graham, 'Epic, Nation and Empire: Notes toward a Bakhtinian Critique', in *Bakhtin and the Nation*, ed. by San Diego Bakhtin Circle (London: Bucknell University Press, 2000), pp. 84-100 (p. 87)
[183] Graham, 'Epic, Nation, and Empire', p. 87. See Mikhail Bakhtin, *Dialogic Imagination*, p. 13.
[184] Graham, 'Epic, Nation, and Empire', p. 88.
[185] Graham, 'Epic, Nation, and Empire', p. 88.
[186] Graham, 'Epic, Nation, and Empire', p. 88-89.

Furthermore, in direct antithesis to the radical inward turn of modernism and its experimentalism, the epic's focus on a communal and public expression seems retrograde to the inner felt life of the ordinary and everyday. In Bakhtin's words the epic is walled off in an exclusive 'zone of absolute distance' which cuts it off from 'personal experience, from any new insights, from any personal initiative in understanding and interpreting, from new points of view and evaluations'.[187] Holquist has summed up the epic's totalitarian desire as setting out to 'purge diversity of this world'.[188] Perhaps most egregiously, if we take Frederic Jameson's seminal article 'Modernism and Imperialism' into account is the epic's complicity with empire and imperial conquest. In this view, the genre is a validating, legitimating and edifying authentication of colonial empire as an adventurous heroic crusade in which is embedded narratives of progress, enlightenment and civilisation.[189]

## Between Negation and Relation: Modernist Epic

In a more recent intervention, C. D. Blanton has explored the implications of the modern theories of epic, which posit that '[h]istorical totality is defined always by its present impossibility', for the epic quest to 'include history'.[190] Modern epic is defined by its desire meeting its impossibility: it is the 'elusive poetics devised under the force of the injunction to include history, but caught simultaneously in a history too complex and often too menacing to include straightforwardly'.[191] This paradox is exacerbated by Pound's definition of epic which Blanton describes in two ways: first, it is about 'that sublime swirl of rhyming events and forces that for Pound compose historical memory'; and, second, the way it also 'intends history' and takes history as a 'conceptual object' in order to attempt to take history's 'patterns as a formally integrated object of representation'.[192]

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[187] Bakhtin, *Dialogic Imagination*, p. 17.
[188] Qtd. in Graham, 'Epic, Nation, and Empire', p. 90.
[189] Fredric Jameson, 'Modernism and Imperialism', in *Nationalism, Colonialism, and Literature*, ed. by Terry Eagleton, Fredric Jameson and Edward W. Said; introduction by Seamus Deane. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, c1990), pp. 43-68.
[190] C. D. Blanton, *Epic Negation: The Dialectical Poetics of Late Modernism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), p. 8.
[191] Blanton, p. 4.
[192] Blanton, p. 5. In the same way that I have argued that epic also carries its literary history as its object of reference and authority, Blanton also suggests that there is another 'secondary stress on the epic's instrumental function – its capacity to intend the present systematically and thereby *include* the history of modernism's own moment'. Blanton, p. 4. This means not only that the epic includes history, but is inclusive of

The reasons for the difficulty of representing the totality of history are complex, multiple and interrelated, ranging from social (increasing fragmentation and specialisation in modern societies); religious (the secularisation thesis); economic (the extension of the capitalist mode of production in ever more complex processes of supply chains of commodities and cultural forms); and, finally, global geo-political (the expansion of empires). Origins become obscure. The entire system is extremely difficult to conceptualise as a whole. Whatever the cause, History becomes a distant and even sublime impossibility for representation.

In order to cope with the 'poetic problem of a modernist epic in general requires that we explain how the history included in a poem comes to mediate a totality that eludes its expression'.[193] Marked as it is by an asymptotic and impossible relationship with its aims, which Blanton argues 'emerge[s] as the very conditions of an epic practice',[194] modernists developed radical aesthetic strategies and methods of inclusion to compensate and 'solve' this conundrum. For Blanton, '[l]ate modernism's formally distinctive epic turn' is not necessarily distinguished by a 'compulsion toward heroic, mythic, or polyphonic modes', but the 'disjointed epic' or 'disarticulated epic', which is 'capable of mediating a totality conceptually'.[195] Modernist epics necessarily invoke both the desire for the 'ghostly

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the history of epic as a genre, and a mode of knowledge constituting the world, and fraught with its own epistemological problems. If we extend Blanton's ideas about the late style of modernism to a justification of the authors present in this thesis, on a meta-critical level, we see the history of modernism as an emergent movement and cultural institution embroiled in the production of these epics. Crane was self-consciously writing against the negative poetics of T. S. Eliot. Jones, even more belated, finds his method increasingly anachronistic as High Modernism fades. Walcott, who receives Eliot in a very different context, alters the view of modernism entirely: from a metropolitan movement, Walcott's epic *Omeros* opens the idea of modernism to different frontiers, and relocates a Eurocentric model in a global framework of diverse modernisms. This thesis, in choosing a mixture of the marginal within Modernism and the peripheral to Modernism, aims to articulate a wider but complementary interpretation and development of Blanton's excellent thesis. His choices for examination of the dialectic of late modernism are still located within the canon of modernist and late modernist writers. If modernism is itself an attempt at instituting a lost cultural totality, then these figures offer a re-routing of modernism, showing it to be a fluid, travelling concept with a complex history. Thus, pushing the periodization of modernism from the after-effects of the inaugural moment of 1922 to Crane's difficult reception and efforts to write in the shadow of modernism's institutional assertion of a particular set of values to spatial extension in the colonial/post-colonial reception of modernism opens up modernism to a new dynamic of forces and influences. Thus, it is an exploration of 'late modernisms, of particular refractions or translations of modernisms as a universalizing formal concept that strains to imagine and produce the thought of history as an immanent totality toward which modernism was already blindly moving'. Blanton, p. 21.

[193] Blanton, p. 5.

[194] Blanton, p. 6.

[195] Blanton, p. 5.

shape'[196] of totality and its impossibility in the structure and form of the works themselves. They rely on methods to negotiate this epistemological crisis of knowledge 'formally and to 'translate historical content into an encrypted poetic index of an entire *field* of historical reference'.[197]

What makes Blanton's intervention interesting is that this requires reading internally for typical modernist aesthetic techniques of inscription of history, but also externally, beyond the poetic text to other discourses which mediate the absent totality. Within the epic text, then, Blanton highlights Pound's paratactic solution to the impossibility of including everything.[198] We might consider Pound's imagism and ideogrammatic method, or T. S. Eliot's aesthetics of fragmentation, juxtaposition and defamiliarising combinations of past and present materials. Also significant is the modernist interplay between surface and depth which reconstellates the nightmare of history each modernist tries to wake from. I would also, tentatively, add the 'mythic method'. In terms of this thesis, Crane offers his own 'logic of metaphor'.[199] Jones adopts a modernist aesthetic of fragmentation, condensed allusion and develops his own Celtic aesthetic of interlacing and archaeological method. Walcott invokes the natural world and creates symbols and metaphors to encapsulate the presence and erasure of meaning.

These techniques, however, only serve to intensify the problem of encryption and 'difficulty'; or, reinscribe, in Blanton's words, the contradiction of increasing 'epic referential scope and the absence of any poetic language sufficient to the task'.[200] Thus, the dream of modernist autonomy belies the absence of totality, and another series of responses is necessary if the poems, which still find themselves unable to structure and make sense of history are to work. To compensate for this, Blanton argues that a form of dialectical relationship to an external extra-literary material device or supra-textual apparatus is necessary to shore up the fragments of modernity's ruins. He posits a 'series of abstract instruments to which these poets successively turn in an attempt to think history whole – calendar, journal, series, unconscious code – suggesting that each in turn constitutes a

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[196] Blanton, p. 8.
[197] Blanton, p. 11.
[198] Blanton, p. 5.
[199] Hart Crane, *O My Land, My Friends: The Selected Letters of Hart Crane*, ed. Langdon Hammer and Brom Weber (New York: Four Walls Eight Windows, 1997), pp. 278-79.
[200] Blanton, p. 9.

conceptual form calibrated to a synthetic or universalizing category'.[201] For example, he shows that Pound in his Cantos depends on a Date Line in order to co-ordinate and structure the historical framework within the poem. Blanton's slightly counter intuitive reading of T. S. Eliot suggests that not only do the notes for 'The Waste Land' provide an extra textual source for historical orientation, but Eliot through his journal, the *Criterion*, published in the 1920s sought to build a cultural and institutional edifice upon which 'The Waste Land' could be read.

What Blanton is suggesting is that intermediary discourses formally impinge on and in the epic, and this as I will argue in more detail in my discussions of form in each chapter, has immediate relevance for Hart Crane's and David Jones's epics, and to a lesser extent Walcott's *Omeros*. Hart Crane's external formal structure is the Brooklyn Bridge itself. It is figured both as a material monument and urban architectural form, organising and constellating city space, and as a cultural and ideological form. In a secular sense, David Jones's relies on a vast, dense archival series of footnotes to explain, expand and authorise the compacted metamorphic form of historical material presented in the poem. More profoundly, and in a variation of the concept of negation, Jones uses the structure of the Mass and his sacramental poetics to formally contain history and provide a vision of totality that other modernist epics lack and so desire. Resisting the historical and cultural narrative of modernity as progress, Walcott uses an ecological and archipelagic structure to suggest a formal variation of history as a totality or linear structure.

The implications of modern epic theory for poets attempting an epic are severe. While I will not explore the validity of Hegel or Lukacs's reading (or non-reading of epic in context) for the purposes of the three epics, and I reserve a discussion of Bakhtin's notion of monologism as opposed to heteroglossia for the chapter on Derek Walcott, it is sufficient to note in this introductory chapter that all the poets writing epic in various ways affirm and counter these models. As far as the poetics of high modernist impersonality allows, Crane and Jones ground their epics in the particular, the local and 'subjective' vision of the modern world. Crane and Walcott, in particular, immerse their epics in the present world and dissolve 'archaic distance' (Crane for modernist aesthetic reasons and Walcott for ideological reasons) treating the contemporary and the ordinary with visionary and intimate

[201] Blanton, p. 10.

energy. The heroes of the modern epics are flawed, foolhardy or seekers, implying 'that neither the goals nor the way leading to them can be directly given'.[202] In these epics, 'crime and madness' are part of the world.[203] In various ways all resist 'totality', whether it is capitalist or imperial, and react against the material and modern encroachment and emptying out of non-utilitarian or 'spiritual values'. However, Crane and Jones attempt to recuperate a vision of totality – it is one which is theological and enchanted, whether expressed through the ecstatic poetics of language or a Catholic influenced theology of sacramental art. Walcott too aspires to the immanent beauty and wonder of natural poetics of place, without lapsing into idealism or a false hope for a total vision of St. Lucia (this in fact would be unethical). In all the modern epics under investigation, it is clear that the authors aspire to wholeness, but only an accommodated totality. This is reflected in the formal aspects of the epics which acknowledge language and the poet's desires for epic totality in the structure and shape of the poem. In a similar way to Lukacs's description of the novel's formal mode, these epics reveal '[a]ll the fissures and rents which are inherent in the historical situation' and which must still 'be drawn into the form-giving process and cannot nor should be disguised by compositional means'.[204]

Furthermore, the inextricable link between a modernity that would render epic an implausible form can be challenged on a few grounds and modified in several respects. First, these theories tend to ignore the phenomenon of multiple modernities.[205] The variety of locations of modernity (the theories of modernity upon which these theories of the epic and novel rest are thoroughly Eurocentric) and differential times of modernity may make totality an even more impossible notion, but they suggest it was never a possibility. In terms of aesthetic and literary implications, the distinction between modernity and epic ignores the continuity and continued creativity of epic writing in the nineteenth and twentieth century. In doing so it exacerbates a literary and aesthetic break which, whilst no doubt significant to modernist writers such as Jones, may nonetheless cover over parallels and commonalities in epic genre. Second, it is predicated on ideas of nature, society and a unity of form and life which are not without their own complexities and contradictions, and which perpetuate a

[202] Lukács, p. 60.
[203] Lukács, p. 61.
[204] Lukács, p. 60.
[205] This is a controversial and debated concept. See Fredric Jameson, *A Singular Modernity* (London: Verso, 2012).

notion of the primitive and archaism via an underlying implicit theory of progress of modernisation. Finally, it curtails or pre-emptively evacuates all hope of adapting and transforming forms in which the epic is rewritten in the modern context as an expression of and reaction to the 'vital experience' of being modern and 'finding ourselves in an environment that promises adventure, power, joy, growth, transformation of ourselves and the world – and, at the same time, that threatens to destroy everything we have, everything we know, everything we are'.[206]

Furthermore, the reliance on the idea of totality, wholeness and unity of epic in design and intention has been overstated, even misconstrued as many have argued.[207] Whilst I would not completely disagree with its importance, just as I would not be as short-sighted as to suggest that the challenges of modernity did not fundamentally alter and change the possibilities of epic writing in the twentieth century, I seek an adjustment or accommodation especially in regards the controlling idea of modernity which is used as a measuring stick with which to beat the epic. This modernity is primarily a western one and it is also implicated in a sometimes primitivistic notion of pre-modern culture and as such has significant knock on effect when taking into account new epics written from other parts of the globe. Second, it relies on a much established, but recently contested notion of modernity as a secular disenchantment or emptying out of religious and spiritual content. By challenging the underlying theory, or at least complicating the picture of modernity and its effects on a literary practice, as well as positively stating the viability of the epic form, the dead epic, or negated epic, is reconfigured as an epic of relation: an epic in relationship with the past, with its fractured and present, and even a form, which seeks to affirm a utopian gesture of the power of the aesthetic to imagine and re-imagine the world. The epic then becomes less of an archaism but more of a mode of and for the future, its viability ventured as a way of preserving cultural material, and projecting the past through the present and into the future.

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[206] Marshall Berman, *All that is Solid Melts into Air: The Experience of Modernity* (London: Verso, 2010), p. 15.
[207] Classics scholars have taken Lukács and Bakhtin to task for their rather generalised and often idiosyncratic reading of the epic in which they ignore the complexities, ironies and literary ambiguities and ambivalence in the epics which they purport to be simply holistic unified monuments to heroic and cultural integrity and expressing an unambiguous moral code. See Gregory Nagy, 'Epic as Genre' in *Epic Traditions in the Contemporary World: The Poetics of Community*, ed. by Margaret H. Beissinger, Jane Tylus and Susanne Wofford (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), pp. 21-32

## Chapter Two: 'Transmemberment' of Epic Song:[1]

## Hart Crane's *The Bridge*

In the first section I will introduce the life of American poet Hart Crane and the grand scope and aims of *The Bridge* with reference to Crane's essay, 'General Aims and Theories' and selected letters. In *The Bridge* Hart Crane sought a new form through which to express a creative response to modernity. In this regard he takes on, albeit problematically, the role of epic bard and makes a vital contribution to the cultural renaissance and revolution in American letters in the first three decades of the twentieth century. I will seek to evaluate the claims made by Crane to epic grandeur as he tried to establish himself as a successful poet – 'a suitable Pindar for the dawn of the machine age'[2] – especially in relation to the feasibility of a modern epic and also the critical reception of Crane amongst his peers and subsequent scholars. In framing *The Bridge* as a modern epic, I set the foundation for a materialist reading rooted in cultural and historical representations but which is nonetheless sensitive to Crane's spiritual vision and unique poetic individuality.

In the second section I focus on the overall aesthetic and epic invocation of *The Brooklyn Bridge* as a framing device and muse for the poem as a whole. I concentrate on the visual and architectural features of the Brooklyn Bridge to show how Crane modernises epic by placing it in the middle of an urban environment. Occupying a privileged position in American cultural history, the monumental structure of the Brooklyn Bridge is both a physical bridge in time and a transformative symbol which generates a multiplicity of potential referents. The Brooklyn Bridge has come to represent the fulfilment of American national material and spiritual aspirations. More than mere nationalism, Crane had a deeply personal attachment to the bridge which is well attested to in his letters. The bridge was a vital mediating structure through which he experienced the joys and despair of city life. In terms of poetics and aesthetics, the Brooklyn Bridge was central to Crane's overarching architectural design for the poem as a structuring device and symbolic catalyst for his expression of history. Not only from the view of the bridge from his house, by drawing on

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[1] Hart Crane, 'Voyages III', *Collected Poems of Hart Crane Centennial Edition*, ed. by Marc Simon (New York: Liveright, 2001), l. 18, p. 36.

[2] Hart Crane, *O My Land, My Friends: The Selected Letters of Hart Crane*, ed. by Langdon Hammer and Brom Weber (New York: Four Walls Eight Windows, 1997), p. 137. That Pindar was a poet of odes and not epic, may be a difficult literary genealogy to reconcile.

the photographs and paintings so important to American cultural history, the Brooklyn Bridge was a functional architectural form, organising and orienting city space, and also an art object to be viewed. Poetically, the Brooklyn Bridge's span and structure give shape to the entire poem as expressions of the everyday and abstract art form.

In the final section, as a bridge to David Jones, I turn to the notion of time and history in the poem in order to briefly assess Crane's 'use' of history and show how he uses modernity's obsession with speed as part of his transcendent vision.

## 'Pindar for the dawn of the machine age' or Absalom?: Hart Crane's Tragic Epic Ambition[3]

Harold Crane was born to wealthy middle-class parents in 1899 Cleveland, Ohio and died by jumping off the *USS Orizaba* into the Gulf of Mexico in 1932. Despite his short and turbulent life Hart Crane was to become an iconic poetic figure who was characterised by the extremes of volatility, intensity and creative energy and also gentle charm, wit and intelligence. Crane suffered from personal and family issues related to his parent's painful and traumatic divorce. This led to ongoing conflicts between himself and both his father, successful businessman Clarence Crane, and highly neurotic and protective mother, Grace née Hart, which exacerbated Crane's sometimes intemperate and excessive personality and emerging problem with alcohol. From a very early age, Crane sought to fashion himself as a poet and it was with single-minded ambition and passionate dedication that he pursued a literary career amidst all the financial, social and cultural difficulties and hardship that this entailed in America in the early twentieth century. Often itinerant, working in temporary, mediocre and mundane jobs (including for his father and in New York as a copywriter in advertising companies), Crane lived an unsettled and unstable life without the material security and assured literary success that other writers and friends of his generation enjoyed. In his life, and arguably in his legacy as a poet, Crane was a complex figure who was at once at the centre of, and yet also relegated to, the margins of literary life in the 1920s. In many ways, judging from his fascinating and generous correspondence,[4] he was an

[3] Hart Crane, *O My Land, My* Friends, p. 137.

[4] For a sensitive review and reading of Crane's letters which were brought out in an updated and uncensored form in *O My Land, My Friends: The Selected Letters of Hart Crane*, ed. by Langdon Hammer and Brom Weber

auto-didact[5] who, without college education was nonetheless very well connected and well versed in the cultural and literary politics of his contemporary scene, forming friendships with a number of writers and poets who would become famous exemplars in American modernist literary pantheon. Crane, who was also an open and confident homosexual, cultivated an ecstatic theatricality, and, eventually tragically saw his aspirations to become a major American poet ruined in an increasingly self-destructive and dissipated personal life. 'Besides being an intellectual', Samuel Delany writes, 'Crane was also a volatile eccentric, often loud and impulsive. A homosexual, who by several reports struck most people as unremittingly masculine, at the same time he was disconcertingly open about his deviancy with any number of straight friends – at a time when homosexuality was assumed a pathology in itself'.[6]

Whilst his first collection of lyrics *White Buildings* garnered critical success as they were published in many major periodicals and modernist magazines, arguably the crowning achievement of his career remains his long poem *The Bridge*. The poems, also published piecemeal in various magazines throughout the 1920s, were always intended to be an organic whole despite the lengthy period of gestation, crafting and construction. (Letters to his benefactor and sponsor Otto Kahn prove that Crane envisaged a totalised structure for the entire collection.)[7] The various sections were composed over a long period of Crane's restless life as he moved across America from various places in the Mid-West including Cleveland; exuberant, stimulating and adventurous times spent in New York; retreats to rural-idyllic Patterson; a failed quixotic trip to California; the productive and vital exile to the Isle of Pines in Cuba; and finalising its publication from Europe where he visited Paris and London.

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(New York: Four Walls Eight Windows, 1997) see David Bromwich's essay, 'Crane in His Letters', *Skeptical Music: Essays on Modern Poetry* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2001), pp. 51-66.

[5] This fact is enough for Allen Tate to bear grave reservations concerning his status as a major poet. He condemns Crane as having 'never acquired an objective mastery of any literature, or even the history of his country' and that in 'any ordinary sense Crane was not an educated man; in many respects, he was an ignorant man', who was, in Tate's estimation, 'incapable of the formal discipline of a classical education. Allen Tate, 'Hart Crane', *Essays of Four Decades* (London: Oxford University Press, 1970), p. 311.

[6] Samuel R. Delany, 'Atlantis Rose … Some Notes on Hart Crane', *Longer Views: Extended Essays* (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1996), pp. 174-250 (p. 189).

[7] For the letters to Otto Kahn see Hart Crane, *O My Land, My Friends*, pp. 235-237. For a later update and synopsis of the progress of the poem to justify extra funds, *O My Land, My Friends*, pp. 344-350.

Crane's ambitions for the poem were always 'epic' – in the sense of a poem of a grand scale, ambition and cultural and historical importance. His project was deliberately written as a response to the pessimism and 'a poetry of negation' in which he viewed T. S. Eliot's recently published poem 'The Waste Land'.[8] Crane wanted to use his own experience and intuitive poetic sensibility to surpass the 'absolute *impasse*' Eliot presented.[9] In his battle with Eliot's formidable poetic success and achievement, the younger poet hopes that he has 'discovered a safe tangent to strike'.[10] Crane sought to move '*through* him toward a *different goal*' thereby using Eliot 'as a point of departure toward an almost complete reverse of direction', in an effort to find 'other positions' and 'pastures new'.[11] This was primarily because he felt that, 'Eliot ignores certain spiritual events and possibilities as real and powerful now as, say, in the time of Blake'.[12] Whilst mixed up with heady assertions of artistic mastery fraught with anxiety and the desire for independence, Crane's early intentions for *The Bridge* were charged with a sense of spiritual and prophetic optimism as he hoped that the poem would become a definitive synthesis and celebration of American modernity – despite its shocks, fissures and fragmentary forces. His muse was as much a myth of America as it was an expression of modern everyday life; all elements transposed through a dense lyrical poetic form influenced by the joyful rhythms of jazz.[13] Of the poetry of negation Crane writes in respectful but defiant opposition:

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[8] Hart Crane, *The Letters of Hart Crane, 1916-1932*, ed. by Brow Weber (New York: Hermitage House, 1952), p. 89. For more in-depth discussion of influence and the relationship between Crane's poem, ideals and poetic aims with that of T. S. Eliot and 'The Waste Land' see Langdon Hammer, *Hart Crane and Allen Tate: Janus-Faced Modernism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), pp. 118-121, pp 139-144.

[9] Crane, *Letters of Hart Crane*, p. 90.

[10] Crane, *Letters of Hart Crane*, p. 90.

[11] Crane, *Letters of Hart Crane*, p. 114, p. 90.

[12] Crane, *Letters of Hart Crane*, p. 115.

[13] Crane's love for jazz has to be set in context of his time and the emergence of the music itself. One must be critical of an all too easy acceptance of his use of jazz as a motif and mood. Some critics have accepted Crane's statements too willingly and eagerly assumed his success in transposing jazz rhythms and syncopations into words. Others have been more cynical of the importance of the complexities of the relationship between the music and poetry – Warner Berthoff blithely dismisses the entire argument as 'pointlessly disputed'. Warner Berthoff, *Hart Crane: A Re-Introduction* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), p. 49. However, set in their cultural context, Crane is at least responsible for appropriating jazz and involved in a fraught interaction with African American culture. More sceptical, David Yaffe argues that like other high modernist writers of this period – notoriously named 'The Jazz Age' – Crane tended to mystify and obscure jazz according to their own preconceptions or artistic agendas. This means that Crane's 'use' of jazz would 'ultimately reveal more about Hart Crane's desire for sonic, celestial transport' than either his real experience and understanding of the music or his lofty statement of intent to transpose jazz into words. David Yaffe, *Fascinating Rhythm: Reading Jazz in American Writing* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), p. 10. He concludes:

> In his attempt to "fuse jazz into words," Crane's dilemma was actually akin to Hamlet's: with his infinite jest, Crane had the power to live up to his "impotent" swinging muse, but if he put too much

> The poetry of negation is beautiful – alas, too dangerously so for my mind. But I am trying to break away from it. Perhaps this is useless, perhaps it is silly – but one does have joys. The vocabulary of damnations and prostrations has been developed at the expense of these other moods, however, so that it is hard to dance in proper measure. Let us invent an idiom for the proper transposition of jazz into words! Something clean, sparkling, elusive![14]

In *The Bridge* Crane attempted to revivify and redeem a morbid and sceptical cultural age whose malaise Eliot had lamented in 'The Waste Land' whilst urging for the poetic realisation of the very spiritual desires which Eliot's poem so desperately sought:

> After ['The Waste Land''s] perfection of death – nothing is possible in motion but a resurrection of some kind.[15]

By combining the technique and learning of Eliot's classicism and his 'mythical method' with a Romantic 'positive [and] ecstatic goal'[16] Crane ambitiously sought a resurrection and recovery of the past in light of a full, affirmative and joyful appreciation of the illuminated present. Crane outlines his poetic vision as a response to a modern condition in one of the few statements of intent – a manifesto of sorts, 'General Aims and Theories'. In what is the same recognition of the dilemmas and crises that many of the modernists had articulated and sought to react to, Crane acknowledges the

> terrific problem that faces the poet today – a world that is so in transition from a decayed culture toward a reorganization of human evolution that there are few

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thought into his project, he would have been in danger of missing the very object he was working so hard to attain.

David Yaffe, 'Special Pleading and Counter-Intuition: Hart Crane's Swinging Muse', *Antioch Review*, 57.3 (Summer 1999), 327-332 (p. 322).

[14] Crane, *Letters of Hart Crane*, p. 89.

[15] Crane, *Letters of Hart Crane*, p. 115.

[16] Crane, *Letters of Hart Crane*, p. 115.

> common terms, general denominators of speech that are solid enough or that ring with any vibration or spiritual conviction.[17]

Here, and in the same terms with which David Jones would characterise the epic poet, Crane suggests that the challenges of modernity are a sense of cultural entropy with the concomitant loss of a language of community. This results in the shattering of collective security in assured foundational beliefs which casts humans adrift and leaves language hollow and empty. Not a particularly original observation, likely drawn from his readings of Nietzsche and Spengler, such problems of modernity were standard fare for sensitive moderns grappling with accelerated industrialised conditions in a globally connected urban space. Crane's experience of New York and his view of America has resonances with Marx's famous dictum, 'all that is solid melts into air' and especially Marshall Berman's classic invocation of Marx in his characterisation of the 'experience of modernity as a paradoxical unity […] a maelstrom of perpetual disintegration and renewal' where to be

> modern is to find ourselves in an environment that promises us adventure, power, joy, growth, transformation of ourselves and the world – and, at the same time, that threatens to destroy everything we have, everything we know, everything we are.[18]

However, in a strikingly different response to the reactions of Eliot and other modernists (including David Jones), Crane situated or suspended himself in the middle of the transition in the midst of the 'maelstrom' claiming that vestiges and traces of tradition remain and are 'operative still – in millions of chance combinations of related and unrelated detail, psychological reference, figures of speech, precepts, etc.'.[19] Crane would reject the 'deliberate program of a "break" with the past or tradition' as a 'sentimental fallacy' as falling into 'useless archaeology'.[20] As I will show the contrast with David Jones cannot be more apparent. In a quintessentially bold American fashion schooled in empiricism and pragmatism while also reminiscent of an Emersonian self-reliance he confidently asserts the

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[17] Hart Crane, 'General Aims and Theories', in *Hart Crane: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. by Alan Trachtenberg (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1982), pp. 13-17 (pp. 13-14).
[18] Marshall Berman, *All that is Solid Melts into Air: The Experience of Modernity* (London: Verso, 2010), p. 15.
[19] Crane, 'General Aims and Theories', p. 14.
[20] Crane, 'General Aims and Theories', p. 14.

poet's ability to 'define his time well enough simply by reacting honestly and to the full extent of his sensibilities to the states of passion, experience and rumination that fate forces on him'.[21] As a New World discoverer poet nourished on Whitman and drunk on the ideals and hopes of Waldo Frank's *Our America* Crane saw no necessity for Old World despair and ennui. Crane and 'America' stood at the centre and as the source of this vital animating power of poetic insight:

> I feel persuaded that here are destined to be discovered certain as yet undefined spiritual quantities, perhaps a new hierarchy of faith not to be developed so completely elsewhere. And in this process I like to feel myself as a potential factor; certainly I must speak in its terms and what discoveries I may make are situated in its experience.[22]

The manifestation of Crane's poetic ideal is first concretely referred to in an oft-cited letter to friend and editor Gorham Munson in February 1923. Nursing a hangover and in state of 'cogitations and cerebral excitements' over his 'new enterprise', Crane writes of a poem called *The Bridge* that will be a '"mystical synthesis of America"'.[23] Crane relates to Munson the incipient stages of poetic inspiration and ecstatic creativity in which he foresees a figure, a thing and an outline of *The Bridge* in these terms:

> The initial impulses of 'our people' will have to be gathered up toward the climax of the bridge, symbol of our constructive future, our unique identity, in which is included also our scientific hopes and achievements of the future. The mystic portent of all this is already flocking through my mind.[24]

Leaving aside for later the contentious notion of 'our people' and 'unique identity',[25] it is the language of a utopian acceptance of scientific machine progress, construction and

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[21] Crane, 'General Aims and Theories', p. 14.
[22] Crane, 'General Aims and Theories', p. 14.
[23] Crane, *Letters of Hart Crane*, p. 124.
[24] Crane, *Letters of Hart Crane*, p. 124.
[25] These are controversial ideas which are embedded in the broad social and political aims of the group of Young Americans' project of cultural renaissance or regeneration through American nativism and exceptionalism of 1910s and 1920s. Such urgent programmatic demands for a revolution of cultural politics

production coupled with the bodily physicality and the enthusiasm or ecstasy of poetic labour which provides the impetus towards an epic venture able to express 'America' that impels Crane's prophetic quasi-religious zeal. Both these rational and irrational forces of shaping in construction, industrial and martial metaphors for the poetic activity work towards creating the effect and movement of poetic process itself. It is one which Crane describes using the language of gathering, physical movement and transcendence towards sublime heights.

A few lines before and after the aforementioned quote Crane suggests that his mental excitement, at this stage only a fervour of shadowy preliminary thought, will inevitably have to result in 'some channel forms or mould into which I throw myself at white heat' and it involves the 'marshalling of the forces' of his almost Dionysian madness.[26] Throughout these early letters Crane mentions several times that he is indeed actually drunk. In a previous letter to Munson in which he relates a powerful epiphany and outer-body experience as a 'kind of seventh heaven of consciousness and egoistic dance' during dentistry, Crane writes:

> At times, dear Gorham, I feel an enormous power in me – that seems almost supernatural. If this power is not too dissipated in aggravation and discouragement I may amount to something sometime. I can say this now with perfect equanimity because I am notoriously drunk and the Victrola is still going with that glorious 'Bolero'.[27]

This statement is both over-confident and bombastic (Crane relates the divine message delivered to him as he undergoes root canal surgery as an affirmation of his genius, 'You

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was a pervasive part of American discourse in the early twentieth century as the Progressive Era waned and a younger generation reacted against an older staid traditionalism and genteelity. See below and especially, Casey Nelson Blake, *Beloved Community: The Cultural Criticism of Randolph Bourne, Van Wyck Brooks, Waldo Frank, and Lewis Mumford* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990).

[26] Crane, *Letters of Hart Crane*, p. 124.

[27] Crane, *Letters of Hart Crane*, pp. 91-92. For an account of enthusiasm in the modern American tradition see David Herd, *Enthusiast!: Essays on Modern American Literature* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007). For a historicist study of the Romantic roots and developments through the long eighteenth century, and discussing Coleridge, Wordsworth and Blake, see Jon Mee who discusses enthusiasm in relation to the order and rational regulatory discourses of reason and the Enlightenment in Jon Mee, *Romanticism, Enthusiasm, and Regulation: Poetics and the Policing of Culture in the Romantic Period* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

have the higher consciousness'.[28] It is prescient of Crane's desperate anxieties and difficulties making a poetic success facing the disappointments of his father's rejection and his failures in the world of commerce which eventually led to his decline into alcoholism.[29] Furthermore, several interrelated aspects in this comment are pertinent for an understanding of Crane's peculiar emotionally charged poetic method of composition. First, although likely true, we must also take into account a certain rhetorical inflation associated with both mood, excess of affect, and the effects of the ether. Having said that, however, some critics have been too scathing in dismissal of such an experience.[30] One must acknowledge the ways in which Crane uses such experiences in order to frame and justify his role as a poet and sources of inspiration oftentimes in opposition to an order of modernist poets quite cerebral and institutional in their designs and aesthetic ideology. Note Crane's redolent enthusiasm in the archaic sense: as *enthousiasmos*. Crane is deliberately figuring himself as a self-fashioned divine poet and thereby directly reconnecting himself with a suppressed affective energy of the Romantic tradition of poets.

Second, touched on tangentially in this quotation, but ubiquitous elsewhere in Crane's observations, is the reference to notions of musicality, intensity, and meditative flight. These often accompany descriptions of speed, momentum and repetition, and reflect Crane's desire to incorporate the new and exciting aspects of a technological modernity into poetic form. Crane's idiosyncratic approach towards poetic writing was expressed in various ways through a variety of means. But they were all part of creating an ecstatic and almost fever pitch intensity of poetic and imaginative states of mind conducive to the initial act of

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[28] Crane, *Letters of Hart Crane*, p. 92. In Yingling's reading of the incident Crane's language belies a repressed or at least sublimated homoeroticism implicitly part of a realisation of poetic power, rather than an entirely singular religious vision:

> As a moment in eternity, the dental-chair experience may seem rather laughable, and it occurs in a place most would identify with excruciating personal pain rather than with the body's ability to transcend pain. But Crane's reconstructed moment of annunciation, and if it is meant to signal the incarnation of his poetic authority, it is also structured as a sublimated moment of impregnation. […] what is repressed in this excerpt from Crane's early life is the body as a site of homosexual desire. A subtext of referents links the dentist's drill to both phallic erections and poetic inspiration.

Thomas E. Yingling, *Hart Crane and the Homosexual Text: New Thresholds, New Anatomies* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1990), p. 162.

[29] For a study on writers and alcoholism including Crane, see Matts G. Djos, *Writing under the influence: Alcoholism and the alcoholic perception from Hemingway to Berryman* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).

[30] Most scathing is notorious critic William Logan's hatchet job on Crane. William Logan, 'Hart Crane Overboard' and 'On Reviewing Hart Crane', in *Our Savage Art: Poetry and the Civil Tongue* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), pp. 166-182.

writing, which would then be repeated (sometimes *ad nauseam* much to the irritation of friends and neighbours). Crane would listen repeatedly to favourite pieces of music, most notably the lengthy building frenzy of Ravel's 'Bolero'.[31] This became a part of a voluble and volatile pattern of poetic work which swung between moments of creative joy and unproductive despair. A typical quote from the most intense and productive periods of composition will suffice to illustrate Crane's mood as it becomes fused with a sense of a wider cultural project:

> I have never been able to live completely in my work before. Now it is to learn a great deal. To handle the beautiful skeins of this myth of America – to realize suddenly, as I seem to, how much of the past is living under only slightly altered forms, even in machinery and such-like, is extremely exciting. So I'm having the time of my life, just now, anyway.[32]

That such a pitch of creativity is impossible to sustain is one of the key factors in the diagnosis of Crane's supposed personality flaws and ultimate tragic fall. And yet Crane believed that he was able to reach a climax of victorious poetic achievement. He later envisions his success as an epic bard in terms of grand public celebrations: 'such a waving of banners, such an ascent of towers, such dancing, etc., will never before have been put down on paper!'[33] Somewhat tongue-in-cheek and with playful ironic self-aggrandisement, Crane lays claim to be working in the familiar mode of the epic poet as prophet and the poetic or cultural gatekeeper – as David Jones would describe it the 'voice of the mythus […] of some contained group of families, or of a tribe, nation, people, cult'.[34]

If we conceive of the cultural and sacred mission implied in this manifesto we may acknowledge that in some ways the poetic process is thought to be *religious*. Religious, that is, in the sense of the dual etymological origins of the word: as *relegere*, from *legere*

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[31] Brian Reed has shown machines and 'innovative acoustic technologies' were integral to this 'infuriating way of writing a poem' which involved excessive alcohol and Crane's beloved Victrola. Brian Reed, *After His Lights* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2006), pp. 98-99. Reed goes on to show how the musical segues into the mechanical. Reed, *After His Lights*, pp. 105-111. See also Brian Reed, 'Hart Crane's Victrola', *Modernism/Modernity*, 7.1 (2000), 99-125.

[32] Crane, *O My Land, My Friends*, p. 272.

[33] Crane, *Letters of Hart Crane*, p. 125.

[34] David Jones, *The Anathemata* (London: Faber and Faber, 2010), p. 21.

meaning to harvest or to gather and/or *religare*, from *ligare* meaning to tie or to bind. In both senses of gathering and collecting materials, whilst also to binding and securing or linking, Crane's epic poetics works towards synthesis and unification of the past whilst projecting forwards and upwards into the future. It is no mistake that nearly at the very end of the journey of the whole epic in 'The Tunnel', which represents Crane's descent into the disintegration of the underworld of urban modernity, he begins to resurface and look upwards towards the final section of 'Atlantis' ending with the lines which echo and rework Eliot's:

> Kiss of our agony Thou gatherest,
>
> O Hand of Fire
>
> gatherest – [35]

Crane attempts the transformation of a myriad of impulses which range from the subjective and personal to the cultural shocks of a changing modern urban life into a heightened state of ecstatic aesthetic experience. The climax of Crane's manifesto, 'General Aims and Theories' articulates this hope and the risks it demands:

> New conditions of life germinate new forms of spiritual articulation. […] I am utilizing the gifts of the past as instruments principally; and that the voice of the present, if it is known, must be caught at the risk of speaking in idioms and circumlocutions shocking to the scholar and historian. Language has built towers and bridges, but itself is inevitably as fluid as always.[36]

In order to achieve this type of synthesis not only would Crane draw upon the collective memory, history and cultural myths of America to form the building blocks and cables of his bridge, but he would transmute these materials into a dynamic shape using the language of the sacred, the sublime and a form of ecstatic poetics. This fusion of the secular and sacred,

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[35] Hart Crane, *Hart Crane's 'The Bridge': An Annotated Edition*, ed. by Lawrence Kramer (New York: Fordham University Press, 2011), p. 123.
[36] Crane, 'General Aims and Theories', p. 17.

history and myth, and the material and immaterial into a dynamic and autonomous form is clear from the initial statements he made to Munson.

The multiple movements and passages of *The Bridge* which move towards the interconnection of the past and present as the poem becomes a dynamic threshold towards the future is the essential basis of Crane's role as a modernist epic poet. It places Crane in a dual and contradictory temporal conjunction. It is one which replicates the difficulties of the modernist project itself caught between the forces of discontinuity attempting to preserve and traditions of the past, whilst reacting against older forms of authoritarian strictures and outmoded social structures in order to experiment and create new modes of being and expression.[37] This dynamic of gathering and binding tradition in relation to the desire for freedom and release is also part of a series of interrelated tensions in the poem between centripetal and centrifugal forces, stasis and movement, national-public and individual-private, epic and lyric and so on. The breadth and sweep of Crane's epic explores the multiplicity and relativity of space and time as it becomes reconfigured in the spatial dislocations and expansions integral to modernity's project and the temporal fragmentariness and proliferation into multiple temporalities (private, commercial, mechanical, historical and mythical). The art object, *The Bridge* itself, will be the focal point which fuses and suspends these dramatic forces.

In describing Crane as an 'epic prophet', Donald Pease has described the juxtaposition and conjunction of these aspects of the modern epic:

> An epic consolidates a way of life by celebrating the ideals that hold a people together; a prophecy disrupts the institutions honored in a nation's history by delivering a vision of an eternal world still to be attained. An epic reminds people of who they were and urges that they remain the same; a prophecy puts a people in mind of who they can be and demands that they change. While epic affirms the continuity between past and future intones upon the harmony between a nation and a transcendental realm authorizing its activities, a prophecy conflates past,

[37] Rendered in Lawrentian mythopoeic terms this can be described with reference to D. H. Lawrence's comments on Edgar Allan Poe whose work exemplified a dual 'rhythm of American art-activity' between a 'disintegrating and sloughing of the old consciousness' and the 'forming of a new consciousness underneath'. Paul Giles, *Hart Crane: The Contexts of 'The Bridge'* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), p. 97.

> present and future into a prophetic moment wherein the infinite moves in the same direction as the finite and the world that can end is consumed in a vision of a world without end.[38]

Hence aligned and in a tension with this binding of a national myth of community based on values of coherence and continuity which Pease describes as epic, and to which I ascribe a spatial dimension manifested in the search for community and love, we note an epiphanic and disruptive vision. This represents a temporal disruption which, while aimed towards a revolutionary future, a utopia of aesthetic realisation, is also a moment of violence and terror promising the unknown. It is also reflected throughout his work in the aesthetic of the sublime. Through this dynamic Crane is projecting the poem towards an anticipated and perhaps unrealisable redemptive future. However, in a paradoxical and seemingly contradictory way, Crane also sought in his poem to convey and presumably enact modernity's prime myth: to annihilate space and time.

A reading of 'Cape Hatteras', which is devoted to the myth and power of flight, shows this complex vision of a modernity unleashing creative and destructive power, and from which Crane as a modern epic poet attempts to draw energy. Crane links the annihilation of space and time to the range of the radio and power of the military and imperialistic aeroplane:

> And from above, thin squeaks of radio static,
> The captured fume of space foam in our ears –
> […]
> Now the eagle dominates our days, is jurist
> Of the ambiguous cloud. We know the strident rule
> Of wings imperious … Space, instantaneous,
> Flickers a moment.[39]

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[38] Donald Pease, 'Hart Crane and The Tradition of Epic Prophecy', in *Critical Essays on Hart Crane*, ed. by David R. Clark (Boston: G. K. Hall, 1982), pp. 255-274 (p. 255). These ideas, as Pease acknowledges in a footnote, are drawn from the critique of the epic made by Lukács and Bakhtin.

[39] Hart Crane, 'Cape Hatteras', *Hart Crane's 'The Bridge'*, l. 18-19, l. 31-34, pp. 72-73.

In this new world of 'splintered space' the power of technology and the machine whose 'nasal whine of power whips a new universe' is deafening.[40] It demands a new language, to see prophetically beyond the 'sharp ammoniac proverbs', a language that tells of the

> New verities, new inklings in the velvet hummed
> Of dynamos where hearing's leash is strummed . . .
> Power's script, - wound, bobbin-bound, refined –
> Is stropped to the slap of belts on booming spools, spurred
> Into the bulging bouillon, harnessed jelly of the stars.[41]

However, Crane is keenly aware amidst the splendour and the din of the machine that the promise or prophecy of the era is uncertain. He struggles to see the future, and, like the subway journey the poet travels on in 'The Tunnel', the speaker is 'shunting into a labyrinth submersed' into a private and obscure dimension where 'each sees only his dim past reversed'.[42] And yet, Crane knows modernity heralds certain violence which modern epics only can imagine in a heroic lust for speed and invention unleashed upon invention:

> Warping the gale, the Wright windwrestlers veered
> Capeward, then blading the wind's flank, banked and spun
> What ciphers risen from prophetic script,
> What marathons new-set between the stars!
> […]
> While Iliads glimmer through eyes raised in pride
> Hell's belt springs wider into heaven's plumed side.[43]

Repeated allusions to Yeats's 'Second Coming' suggest that the gyres turn mysteriously and inscrutably. Moderns are not sure what rough beast is, not slouching, but zooming towards them. If the modern age has found its heroes in aviators and dogfights, 'War's fiery kennel',

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[40] Crane, 'Cape Hatteras', l. 58, p. 75, l. 114, p. 78.
[41] Crane, 'Cape Hatteras', l. 61-66, p. 75.
[42] Crane, 'Cape Hatteras', l. 25, p. 72.
[43] Crane, 'Cape Hatteras', l. 79-82, p. 76, l. 90-91, p. 77.

it is nevertheless potentially destructive.[44] Almost predicting the total war David Jones would endure during the London blitz, the 'tournament of space' rains on modern subjects with,

> […] rancorous grenades whose screaming petals carve us
> Wounds that we wrap with theorems sharp as hail![45]

Crane realises that the meaning of the aeroplane is essential for the epic poet to understand the future. The poet ascribes to the pilot mystical powers of insight and implores him to 'hear!' and 'see' in order to 'reckon' the 'doom:

> Remember, Falcon-Ace,
> Thou hast there in thy wrist a Sanskrit charge
> To conjugate infinity's dim marge –
> Anew . . . ![46]

But Crane refuses to relinquish the epic voice to science and the technology of war. They must receive the poet's 'benediction'.[47] Here the dialectic of modernity's enlightenment becomes grafted onto a contradiction of poetic prophecy for Crane. He needs to find a poetic voice to match the spectacle of flight. In the American epic tradition, carrying its own risks and implications, Crane attempts to resurrect and conjure the voice of Walt Whitman. He summons Whitman to resurrect an epic line of hero bards:

> O, upward from the dead
> Thou bringest tally, and a pact, new bound
> Of living brotherhood![48]

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[44] Crane, 'Cape Hatteras', l. 93, p. 77.
[45] Crane, 'Cape Hatteras', l. 96-97, p. 77. These lines are worth comparing to Jones's terrifying description of a shell landing near Private John Ball. David Jones, *In Parenthesis*, p. 24.
[46] Crane, 'Cape Hatteras', l. 121, l. 126-129, p. 79.
[47] Crane, 'Cape Hatteras', l. 130, p. 81.
[48] Crane, 'Cape Hatteras', l. 150-152, pp. 80-81.

Whitman is figured as a hero of flight 'there beyond – | Glacial sierras and the flight of ravens', but he is 'Hermetically past condor zones' which spells several ambiguities and problems.[49] First, the discontinuities and unprecedented changes of technological invention are the cause for Crane's search and yet destructive of the very ground, 'our native clay', he seeks to 'return home to our own | Hearths' on which to meet and read Whitman.[50] Crane has to validate his epic line on the Open Road or the tracks and highways of transport. He risks treading dangerously on a tightrope of contradiction and paradox as he has to travel the very routes and networks of material expansion towards a spiritual redress. Second, in addition to the underlying suspicion that Whitman remains inscrutable, he realises that Whitman might not even recognise the future Crane lives. The epic line of communication integral to continuous transmission of tradition is jeopardised.

> " – Recorders ages hence" – ah, syllables of faith!
> Walt, tell me, Walt Whitman, if infinity
> Be still the same as when you walked the beach
> Near Paumanok.
> […]
> Years of the Modern! Propulsions toward what capes?[51]

Crane finds that he must assert continuity of vision even given the dramatic catastrophes modernity has brought, and the fear that America has not lived its prophetic promise as Whitman had hoped.[52] Crane's wilful ecstasy to reclaim his vision needs to overcome modernity's turbulence, but also the grave. He invokes Whitman as a magic doctor-mourner who like Christ will by 'memories of vigils, by that Cape, – Ghoul-mound of man's perversity' suture and heal transgenerational traumas:

> Thou, pallid there as chalk

[49] Crane, 'Cape Hatteras', l. 152-154, p. 81.
[50] Crane, 'Cape Hatteras', l. 12, p. 72
[51] Crane, 'Cape Hatteras', l. 42-44, p. 74, l. 192, p. 84.
[52] 'If only America were half as worthy today to be spoken of as Whitman spoke of it fifty years ago there might be something for me to say […] time has shown how increasingly lonely and ineffectual his confidence stands'. Crane, *O My Land, My Friends*, p. 259.

> Hast kept of wounds, O Mourner, all that sum
> That then from Appomattox stretched to Somme.[53]

Crane's vision of epic depends on eyes and hands and following in 'Our Meistersinger' Whitman's footsteps.[54] He must read 'thy lines', see with 'eyes tranquil with the blaze | Of love's diametric gaze, of love's amaze!'[55] Whitman is the epitome and the apotheosis of the epic bard and his hand is needed to cross the bridge of time and change. Crane locates Whitman, allied with the community of 'mendicants in public spaces', and with 'breath set in steel' on the Brooklyn Bridge as,

> […] it was thou who on the boldest heel
> stood up and flung the span on even wing
> of that great Bridge, our Myth, whereof I sing![56]

This ambitious Janus-faced[57] 'vision' facing backwards and forwards is integral to his shaping of *The Bridge* and faith for an epic community. It may not appease the sceptical. Crane was keenly aware that the traditional poetic mould or forms required to express this 'mystic synthesis' were unsuitable, and in his correspondence with Yvor Winters in 1926 in the middle of the long composition of *The Bridge* he acknowledges the difficulties besetting him:

> And you are right about modern epics – except – until somebody actually overcomes the limitations. This will have to be done by a new form, – and, of course, new forms are never desirable until they are simply forced into being by new materials. Perhaps any modern equivalent of the old epic form should be called by some other name, for certainly, as I see it, the old definition cannot cover the kind of poem I am trying

[53] Crane, 'Cape Hatteras', l. 161-165, pp. 81-82.
[54] Crane, 'Cape Hatteras', l. 198, p. 84.
[55] Crane, 'Cape Hatteras', l. 183, p. 83.
[56] Crane, 'Cape Hatteras', l. 188-191, p. 84.
[57] The description is taken from Langdon Hammer's book. He writes that the subtitle 'describes that double focus' between Crane and Tate as well as referring 'to the historical process in which both poets participate – the making of a modernist literary culture in America, a process in which opposing energies contend and cooperate, working to undo traditional authority and to reconstruct it in new forms'. Hammer, p. ix.

> to write except on certain fundamental points. […] both are concerned with material called mythical … But what is 'mythical' in or rather, of the twentieth century is not the Kaiser […] rather it is science, travel (in the name of speed) – psychoanalysis, etc. With, of course, the old verities of sea, mountain and river still at work.
>
> The old narrative form, then – with its concomitant species of rhetoric, is obviously unequal to the task. It may well be that the link-by-link cumulative effect of the ancients cannot have an equivalent in any modern epic form. However, there are certain basically mythical factors in our Western world which literally cry out for embodiment. Oddly, as I see it, they cannot not be presented completely (any one of them) in isolated order, but in order to appear in their true, luminous reality must be presented in chronological and organic order, out of which you get a kind of bridge, the quest of which bridge is – nothing less ambitious than the annihilation of time and space, the prime myth of the modern world.[58]

Reading this statement closely shows that Crane is not advocating a simplistic return to the world of myth nor an idealistic bucolic idyll of the past; the modern epic must respond to and be created from the conditions of technological modernity. But it is not a complete rejection of history, Ford's bunk. Crane's poem is not matter for a deterministic narrative history of, 'one thing after another', but a shaped history taking chronology and transmuting it into organic form he calls myth – a sort of master narrative – which would have redemptive and visionary power. Here myth is best conceived not as pre-Enlightenment falsity or primitive non-rational explanation, but in fact aligned with the very ideological basis of modernity: a Faustian theodicy justifying the overcoming of space and time which is the very ground for science and material progress, and a poetry which would see history and/or modernity in its total and holistic light or its 'true luminous reality'.[59]

That Crane was willing even to attempt to overcome the limitations of the epic form in a modern era so inimical to such a project has given many critics the impetus for their critique of *The Bridge*. It is this epic scope and prophetic ambition to reconcile the realities of a fragmented social and cultural modern condition with a transcendent or luminous

[58] Crane, *O My Land, My Friends*, p. 287-288.
[59] Crane, *O My Land, My Friends*, p. 287-288.

realisation of the whole which draws the most criticism and has informed the perennial view of *The Bridge* as 'splendid failure' and its tragic vision.[60] Indeed, despite the seeming impossibility and futility of the epic, the unceasing will for an epic persists. The Quixotic desire and ambition to write epic has itself become a part of what an epic is defined as. For Daniel Gabriel, who argues that the question of the epic genre in Crane criticism, has not received enough critical attention, it is the 'struggle to acquire an epic voice' which left 'Crane at times crippled in these ambitions, depressed and dysfunctional'.[61] More generally, Thomas Greene describes the challenge of aspiring to the epic mode as an 'historical fact – that the legendary epic ideal was like a spirit that seized and rode great men, haunting and exhausting them, driving them sometimes to misdirect their gifts, but also, in some few cases, to surpass them'.[62]

At the initial creative beginnings of the poem Crane would describe his aims in such grandiloquent and ambitious terms, and to his benefactor Otto Kahn and Waldo Frank he could couch the projected work in an aura of glory and cultural renascence. And yet, arguably his own best critic,[63] there is a critical realisation from the outset that the magnitude of the task will be arduous: in the letter to Munson quoted above, the 'final difficulties' of the work 'appals'.[64] After the protracted and turbulent period of writing and the constant attrition of the search for gainful employment, Crane would admit in a more tempered letter to Gorham Munson in April 1927 that he looks on the 'spiritual disintegration' of the period with a more stoic and even resigned attitude.[65] Crane writes with an awareness of the problematic commercial viability of poetry that it becomes 'more

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[60] The phrase is from the title of Edward Brunner's *Splendid Failure: Hart Crane and the Making of The Bridge* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1985). For more on this indictment of Crane and the poem see especially the view amongst critics of Crane's immediate generation such as Allen Tate, Yvor Winters, influentially R. W. Blackmur's essay, 'New Thresholds, New Anatomies: Notes in a Text of Hart Crane', in *Hart Crane: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. by Alan Trachtenberg (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1982), pp. 49-64. For Crane's recuperation by critics sympathetic to a Romantic form of modernism, and invested in belief of the transformative power of symbol and myth in a modern redemptive poetics see L. S. Dembo, *Hart Crane's Sanskrit Charge: A Study of The Bridge* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1960) and Jack C. Wolf, *Hart Crane's Harp of Evil: A Study of Orphism in The Bridge* (New York: Whitson Publishing Company, 1986), M. D. Dickie, *Hart Crane: The Patterns of his Poetry* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1974).

[61] Daniel Gabriel, *Hart Crane and the Modernist Epic: Canon and Genre Formation in Crane, Pound, Eliot, and Williams* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), pp. 1-2.

[62] Thomas Greene, qtd. in Thomas A. Volger, *Preludes to Vision: The Epic Venture in Blake, Wordsworth, Keats, and Hart Crane* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971), p. 2.

[63] Biographer John Unterecker has written: 'No one in fact, has subsequently so efficiently attacked Crane's basic assumptions as Crane himself did here'. John Unterecker, qtd. in Brunner, *Splendid Failure*, p. 118.

[64] Crane, *Letters of Hart Crane*, p. 124.

[65] Crane, *O My Land, My Friends*, p. 370.

painful to me every day, so much so that I now find myself baulked by doubt at the validity of every metaphor I coin'.[66] Interestingly, Crane does not find a suitable response or 'remedy' in either a nostalgia for the past in the form of the anti-modernist vogue for the 'arbitrary dogmatism' and 'strictly European system of values' such as Neo-Thomism' or any naïve belief or faith in the 'future' which is 'the name for the entire disease'.[67] He will, of course, continue to write *The Bridge* and inscribe the conflicts and nihilism within the poem itself attenuating and ameliorating the conflicts in the lights and shadows of the verse.

Most often cited to argue that Crane disavowed his initial optimism and faith in his epic project are a series of letters a few months later to Waldo Frank in which he seems to completely renege on his optimistic inspiration for *The Bridge*. Closer analysis of the letter, however, reveals the complex and interrelated difficulties Crane faced in bringing his 'mythical synthesis' to fruition. There are several reasons for his prevarications and struggles all of which shed light not only on the kind of person Crane was, his psychology, sexuality, and poetic impulses, but also on the idea of the epic in modern era. Much of the vacillation, then, seems in part due to an encroaching personal lack of belief in his poetic powers, but mostly Crane attributes it to a wider social and communal cultural malaise which threatens to fragment the common basis of culture and destroy its authentic materials and myths rendering them obsolete. Poetry, in general, since the turn of the twentieth century had suffered a precarious and diminished stature or reputation in an ever-commercialised and utilitarian America. Poetry was 'widely viewed as a mawkish refuge for dilettantes and sentimentalists'.[68] Furthermore, on the very brink of extinction poetry's 'powers had been circumscribed by genteel custodians bent upon protecting it from the sullying forces of modern life: urbanization, organized labor, commodity culture'.[69] This crisis of poetry which threatened to be 'fatal' seemed to point towards poetry as the '"rickety dream-child of neurotic aestheticism"', or a 'pathetic orphan in twentieth-century cultural marketplaces dominated by hypercommercialized ephemera such as mass-circulation newspapers, popular songs, and dime novels'.[70]

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[66] Crane, *O My Land, My Friends*, p. 370.
[67] Crane, *O My Land, My Friends*, p. 370.
[68] John Timberman Newcomb, *How Did Poetry Survive?: The Making of Modern American* Verse (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2012), p. 1.
[69] Newcomb, *How Did Poetry Survive?*, p. 1.
[70] Newcomb, *How Did Poetry Survive?*, p. 1.

Suggesting the hazardous redundancy of the epic, Crane writes in a way which would corroborate the ideas of Lukács or Bakhtin on the epic as a viable modern form: [71]

> Emotionally I should like to write *The Bridge*; intellectually judged the whole theme and project seems more and more absurd. […] I had what I thought were authentic materials [which were] valid to me to the extent that I presumed them to be (articulate or not) at least organic and active factors in the experience and perceptions of our common race, time and belief. The very idea of a bridge, of course, is a form peculiarly dependent on such spiritual convictions. It is an act of faith besides being a communication.[72]

At a desperate moment embroiled in personal and professional difficulties, Crane, who found himself isolated and dislocated on the Isle of Pines in the Caribbean and far removed from what had seemed like the birth of an artistic community in the early 1920s in New York, feels the initial excitement and inspiration wane and his poetic 'faith' dissipate into doubt and recriminations.[73] Crane becomes trapped in solipsistic and self-loathing criticism as he despairs that the 'subjective significance' of the bridge fails as a 'symbol of reality necessary to articulate the span' of 'these forms, materials, dynamics [is now] simply non-existent in the world'.[74] In a statement of self-destructive and bitter irony Crane wishes he were 'an efficient factory of some kind!' and even resents being 'helped by our friend, the banker' as 'with my nose to the grindstone of the office I could still fancy that freedom would yield me a more sustained vision; now I know that much has been lacking all along'.[75]

Somehow the paradox of his poetic vision is symbiotically created in and, in a contradictory manner thrives on the very entrapment within which it is caught. And even

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[71] See for instance 'Epic and the Novel', in *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, ed. by Michael Holquist, trans. by Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), pp. 13-15.
[72] Crane, *Letters of Hart Crane*, p. 261.
[73] Crane had struggled to establish a secure income for himself and continued to eke out a meagre living in various unfulfilling forms of employment whilst continuing to squabble and feel a bitter resentment towards his father's perceived lack of generosity and understanding. Furthermore, in what seemed like the dissolution and fragmentation of a core group of intellectuals on which Crane could rely on for succour and support intellectually, emotionally and materially in the form of finance and sustenance his key friendships had been seriously compromised in a nasty series of arguments and conflicts, first with Allen Tate and his wife Caroline Gordon, and then Charlotte and Richard Rychtarik. Edward Brunner, *Splendid Failure*, pp, 118-119.
[74] Crane, *Letters of Hart Crane*, p. 261.
[75] Crane, *Letters of Hart Crane*, p. 259.

when a tantalizing offer of creative space and a modicum of financial security is won, it turns out to be an illusory freedom, and his 'vision' disappears, leaving Crane listless, anxious, and in a state of creative block, yearning for the efficiency of the machine. The very social and economic conditions and tough realities of the commercial world which had alienated Crane and oppressed him with boredom and menial unsuccessful enterprises are desired as the last viable means to facilitate poetic production. Like a malcontent Crane rails against the commercialism and vapidity of modern society in which the 'artist more and more licks his own vomit, mistaking it for the common diet' as he 'amuses himself that way in a culture without faith and convictions'.[76] And yet he craves the success and fame – no doubt institutional and financial from publishers and poets, and perhaps from the likes of his father, the petty businessmen – which an epic synthesis would bring him.[77] More specifically, in his search for an 'organic form' of poetic creation he finds himself caught between the disjunctions of the certitudes of the forms of the past and modernity's relentless ongoing project. In addition to these misgivings in which he has realised that there is no 'good evidence forthcoming from the world in general that the artist isn't completely out of a job' he is confronted 'with a ghostliness that is new' – the ghosts being perhaps the spectres of poetic heroes.[78] Equating writing poetry with the heroic action to which he aspires, Crane fears he may be merely 'playing Don Quixote in an immorally conscious way.[79] Crane goes on, seemingly resigned to the spiritual values being subsumed by the instrumental Taylorism of the commercial workday:

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[76] Crane, *Letters of Hart Crane*, p. 259.

[77] Crane's attitude and feelings towards commercialism are ambivalent at best, and he never offered a whole-hearted rejection but more of a bitter lament. His father was a successful businessman, and complex feelings of love, rejection and dependence hampered Crane's ability to be a success in the commercial sense. Anecdotal reference to his job as an advertising agent for some of the Little Magazines early on in his New York days attest in some ways to this mixed reaction of dependence, disdain and also ambition for a career. Ultimately though, it is as an artist that Crane sought validation and success. At the end of a long heartfelt letter to his estranged father, a man who regarded poetry as an effete and amateurish pastime, Crane tries to explain his decision in declining a job with him in the family business:

> And in closing I would like to just ask you to think some time, – try to imagine working for the pure love of simply making something beautiful, – something that maybe can't be sold or used to help sell anything else, but that is simply a communication between man and man, a bond of understanding and human enlight[en]ment – which is what a real work of art is. If you do that, then maybe you will see why I am not so foolish after all to have followed what seems sometimes only a faint star. […] I only ask to leave behind me something that the future may find valuable […] I shall make every sacrifice toward that end.

Crane, *O My Land, My Friends*, pp. 179-180.

[78] Crane, *Letters of Hart Crane*, p. 260.

[79] Crane, *Letters of Hart Crane*, p. 261

> The form of my poem rises out of a past that so overwhelms the present with its worth and vision that I'm at a loss to explain my delusion that there exists any real links between that past and a future destiny worthy of it. The 'destiny' so long completed, perhaps the little last section of my poem is a hangover echo of it – but it hangs suspended somewhere in ether like an Absalom by his hair. The bridge as a symbol today has no significance beyond an economical approach to shorter hours, quicker lunches, behaviorism and toothpicks.[80]

Here Crane's complaint is doubled: it is, on the one hand, a lament against an unfavourable and malign contemporary cultural condition. On a cultural level Crane argues that,

> The validity of a work of art is situated in contemporary reality to the extent that the artist must honestly anticipate the realization of his vision in 'action' (as an actively operating principle of communal works and faith).[81]

Increasingly disconnected and dislocated, Crane was finding that this 'action' which united his poem and a select few admiring and understanding readers into a wider cultural community was becoming more and more difficult, especially in the form of an epic that he had envisaged and hoped for in the early 1920s. Embedded in this complaint is the real sense that what Crane is ultimately suffering from is a feeling of belatedness and the alienating effects of marginalisation and exclusion from the recognition of a community of poets which were gaining authority and respect. For even 'the rapturous and explosive destructivism' of Rimbaud who as a heroic 'lonely hauteur' had some 'estimation or appreciation' – what Crane generalises as a 'background of an age of faith'.[82] Crane desperately craves a context and community for the assimilation of his poetic 'experience'.[83] Finding this sorely lacking, his poetry threatens to become mere rhetoric or 'word painting and juggling'.[84] Crane finds himself languishing in an anxiety of influence in

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[80] Crane, *Letters of Hart Crane*, p. 261.
[81] Crane, *Letters of Hart Crane*, p. 260.
[82] Crane, *Letters of Hart Crane*, p. 260.
[83] Crane, *Letters of Hart Crane*, p. 260.
[84] Crane, *Letters of Hart Crane*, p. 259.

the shadow of the great poets of a preceding age. Rimbaud was the 'last great poet that our civilization will see' who has already 'let off all the great cannon crackers in Valhalla's parapets' so that the 'sun has set'; the poetic world pessimistically is ending with 'Eliot and others of that kidney [who] have whimpered fastidiously'.[85] This grievance gets ironically manifested in a bitter sense of a lack of acknowledgment amidst the success of others. In a reversal of his agonised youthful feelings of difference and desolation in a philistine materialistic industrial Mid-West city like Akron where no one wrote poetry except shamefully in private – 'In this town, poetry's a | Bedroom occupation'[86] – Crane resentfully now finds New York teeming with poets who are even attaining the success he has dreamed of:

> *Everybody* writes poetry now – and 'poets' for the first time are about to receive official social and economic recognition in America. It's really all the fashion, but a dead bore to anticipate.[87]

On the other hand, Crane is expressing a deeper and hidden anxiety concerning the authenticity and reception of his own poetry, which is implicitly connected to his problematic status as a homosexual man. In turn, this notion of recognition and distinction is exacerbated by his concerns for perpetuity into the future; terrified of failure and namelessness, Crane seeks an enduring poetic destiny connecting past to future. By identifying so closely with Rimbaud and Whitman (and in other instances Wilde and Swinburne) Crane is, of course, placing himself in a lineage of poets ostracised and rejected in terms of their Romantic aesthetic, democratic idealism, and, their 'aberrant' morality and sexuality.[88] Unable to express his sexuality openly and establish himself as a national poet, Crane finds himself alienated from the institutional and legitimating modes of cultural

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[85] Crane, *Letters of Hart Crane*, p. 261.
[86] Hart Crane, 'Porhyro in Akron', *Collected Poems of Hart Crane*, Centennial Edition, ed. by Marc Simon (New York: Liveright, 2001), p. 152.
[87] Crane, *Letters of Hart Crane*, p. 261.
[88] Hammer quotes a conversation between Tate and biographer John Unterecker: 'What [Crane] wanted to identify himself with Whitman, I don't know. Hart had a sort of megalomania: he wanted to be The Great American Poet. I imagine that he thought by getting into the Whitman tradition, he could carry even Whitman further. And there's another thing we must never forget – there was the homosexual thing, too. […] The notion of "comrades," you see, and that sort of business'. Hammer, p. 177.

power.[89] This is the crux of Yingling's, and later, Hammer's argument. Yingling has argued that 'the ideology of literary and cultural authority under which Crane wrote would have made homosexuality an inadmissible center from which to write about American life'.[90]

Crane mediates these apprehensions through the allusion of his poem, and to a certain extent perhaps himself, to Absalom. The analogy to the Biblical figure of the son revolting against his father and trapped helplessly in a tree captures Crane's sense of flight, vulnerability and even libidinal investment in a poetic project fraught with Oedipal resonances that courts danger and disaster. Absalom's 'terrifying and ridiculous' situation suggests that Crane faces 'intellectual and professional embarrassment' which also has 'implications for his masculinity'.[91] That the epic genre seems to be undertaken in the main

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[89] This is the crux of Yingling's, and later Hammer's argument. Yingling has argued that 'the ideology of literary and cultural authority under which Crane wrote would have made homosexuality an inadmissible center from which to write about American life'. Crane, qtd. in Hammer, p. 172. See also, Catherine A. Davies, *Whitman's Queer Children: America's Homosexual Epics* (London: Bloomsbury, 2012) and Niall Munro, *Hart Crane's Queer Modernist Aesthetic* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015).

[90] Yingling, p. 27.

[91] Hammer, p. 174. Nor is this the only reference to Absalom in Crane's writing. An earlier allusion sheds further light on the precarious and fragile nature of Crane's poetic identity which negotiates the paradoxes of the intimacy of experience and intensities of affect with the language of poetic self-expression, both of which are set in a suspended and timorous relation to the violent sacrifices demanded by the reality of the world. In fact, it bridges Crane's development of a lyric self of singular private expression to the epic voice of public vocation and futurity. In the complex and ambiguous poem the doubled voice and spilt consciousness of the lyric speaker questions himself as his 'Janus-faced […] double' and/or perhaps a lover as platonic soul mate, both 'twin shadowed halves' and 'brother in the half'. Crane, 'Recitative', *Collected Poems*, p. 25. Whilst looking in the mirror in the gradually emerging cityscape at dawn, the self of experience, desire, love and passion faces a dilemma: in constructing poems in an *agon* of self-recognition and becoming he realises that the sublime heights of emotion – 'pain and glee' – in poetic recitation and linguistic repetition are not revoked or given relief. Calling for a unified sensibility in amidst this fragmentation and misrecognition inherent in poetic creation, the speaker implores a sense of courage and forgiveness, hoping that in hearing 'alternating bells', 'All hours clapped [will be] into a single stride' creating a continuous bond of proud community:

> Forgive me for an echo of these things,
> And let us walk through time with equal pride. Crane, 'Recitative', p. 25.

Grappling with problems of dissociation, a potentially shameful, hidden sexuality, and yet beset by a will to power and the forceful urge for lyric articulation in harmony, the poet also fears the abyss of namelessness.

> Let the same nameless gulf beleaguer us –
> Alike suspend us from atrocious sums
> Built floor by floor on shafts of steel that grant
> The plummet heart, like Absalom, no stream. Crane, 'Recitative', p. 25.

Hence, Irwin points out, the allusion of Absalom is figured in two complex senses: one as the suspended figure between the branches of the oak ('taken up between heaven and earth'. 2 Samuel 18:9), and the other as a pillar named after Absalom as a remembrance of the progenitor and, since he had no son, acting as the embodiment of progeny repeated through time. John T. Irwin, *Hart Crane's Poetry: 'Appollinaire lived in Paris, I live in Cleveland, Ohio'* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2011), pp. 324-325. Considering of course the setting of the poem, Irwin links the towers to the skyscrapers of Manhattan – the 'Wrenched gold of Nineveh' Crane, 'Recitative', p. 25. But we may push the connection further and note that it is in fact the image of Brooklyn Bridge with its suspension cable and two towers which Crane has in mind here. Foreshadowing the grand poetic monuments of the 'Proem: To Brooklyn Bridge' and 'Atlantis' and the connecting erotic space of

by male writers in a seemingly heroic discourse of action, war and conquest effort is complicated by Crane's marginalised position as a homosexual poet. The assumed epic values of community, patriarchy and cultural unity in terms of a national, as well as socio-sexual order not open to Crane, are therefore renegotiated, contested through the conflicts over an inexpressible desire and sexuality encoded in *The Bridge*.

So not only does Crane find it difficult to write *The Bridge* in a culture obsessed with a 'money complex'[92] and which disdains the high minded attempt at epic, the fact of his exile on the Isle of Pines expresses an exclusion and 'inability to maintain both erotic and social bonds in his life'.[93] Hammer expresses the paradox and double bind of Crane's poetic project which was caught between cultural critique and the impossible acceptance in a community of poet-critics who were increasingly forming a conservative and institutionalised centre. He writes, 'the principle of Crane's identification with Whitman – of his *inclusion* in the human community Whitman projected – can be seen at the same time as the principle of Crane's *exclusion*'.[94] The 'terms under which Crane sought community were also the terms under which he chose exile; and the quest for personal relationship Crane undertook in *The Bridge* called for a passage beyond sanctioned forms of address in which erotic and linguistic aberration converged'.[95]

In the end, however, *The Bridge* did get written. Even if the process was long, exhausting and chaotic in its compilation, despite Crane's despair, it remains one of the finest long poems of the twentieth century. As Hammer points out, the 'many stages of *The Bridge*'s development, the expansion and contraction of Crane's plans for it, the stops and starts of composition, record Crane's ongoing experience of that dilemma, his vacillation between hope and despair'.[96] This low point and apparent impasse marked a dramatic turn and Crane's time on the Isle of Pines sparked the most creative period during which he wrote many of the remaining lyrics of *The Bridge*. Indeed, at the end of this revealing tirade to Waldo Frank, Crane knowingly, playfully, and somewhat sheepishly admits that,

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the inner room of 'Harbor Dawn', the two abiding impulses and tensions in Crane's poetry are expressed. Implicit then are the towers of sublime transcendence and the suspension between towers ideally connecting moments, self and selves in time and community.

[92] Crane, *Letters of Hart Crane*, p. 72.

[93] Hammer, p. 177.

[94] Hammer, p. 177.

[95] Hammer, p. 177.

[96] Hammer, p. 172.

> – All this does not mean that I have resigned myself to inactivity. […] A bridge will be written in some kind of style and form, at worst it will be something as good as advertising copy. After which I will have at least done my best to discharge my debt to Kahn's kindness.[97]

The relative freedom from the constraints and pressures of New York, familial conflicts and fallouts with friends were in fact a catalyst and integral to the reinvigoration necessary to the composition of the poem. Indeed, the marginal or peripheral position and the effect of the Caribbean landscape on Crane seems to have worked on his poetic imagination and extended his vision of what 'America' constituted in significant ways. His brief comment to Otto Kahn providing an update on the poem's progress, admittedly in recompense for an advance in more funding, suggests just this. Using the cliché that 'Rome was not built in a day', Crane draws what seems a rather arrogant comparison with *The Aeneid* which was not written in two years. Describing *The Bridge* as a work with great historical and cultural scope, 'a symphony with an epic theme, and a work of considerable profundity and inspiration', Crane relates to Kahn that,

> Even with the torturing heat of my sojourn in Cuba I was able to work faster than before or since then, in America. The 'foreign-ness' of my surroundings stimulated me to the realization of natively American materials and view-points in myself not hitherto suspected, and in one month I was able to do more work than I had done in previous years.[98]

Alongside the other lyrics he wrote, 'O Carib Isle!' which reflects a maturing and developing realisation of the limits of poetic power, a tempering of his mystical claims for poetic language, and, by having to conjure the space of America from memory, paradoxically, Crane was able to get closer to a transfiguration of the material realities of the epic into verse. The facet of a literary modernism predicated on exile and wandering is evident here,

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[97] Crane, *Letters of Hart Crane*, p. 262.
[98] Crane, *O My Land, My Friends*, p. 349.

as is the suggestion that it is from the periphery – but notably a colonised and underdeveloped space - that a truly creative response to the vortex of metropolitan forces is articulated. Crane's most recent biographer Clive Fisher has emphasised the importance of the experience there and the unique work produced from it:

> Hart Crane is one of the few white poets to have flourished in the tropics: there is little English or American poetry analogous to his Caribbean meditations […] inspired by a natural world more beautiful and more implacable than anything they had registered in the north […] apprehension of a sublime terrestrial force beyond human calculation or containment.[99]

A few letters later Crane is back to a high pitch of joyful inspiration: his 'plans are soaring again, the conception swells'.[100] Through a combination of a change in fortunes and readiness, 'his memories, his reading, his nostalgia for New York, his conviction of poetic greatness, his very vision of America which like all giants was best appraised from afar – suddenly and mysteriously coalesced in this house' and he was able to undertake a 'period of lyric inventiveness that lasted for the next ten weeks'.[101]

Critics are divided as to the importance and significance of such drastic changes in Crane's attitude and how they relate to the overall success of *The Bridge* as a poem. As a result, depending on the various ways that critics have interpreted Crane's despair, inevitably the types of critical responses to this temperamental volubility and volatility segue into a wider comment on Crane's legacy as a modernist. In his re-introduction and reassessment of Crane, Warner Berthoff has suggested 'two presuppositions' which have 'regularly worked to distract appreciation'.[102] One such presupposition, to which I will return later as it informs the basis of my study concerns in Berthoff's words, 'the poem's synoptic canvass of American history and myth' and debates the 'success or failure in *The*

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[99] Clive Fisher, *Hart Crane: A Life* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), p. 303.
[100] Crane, *Letters of Hart Crane*, p. 268.
[101] Fisher, pp. 306-307.
[102] Berthoff, p. 84. Yingling also organizes readings of Crane into a taxonomy of four types of readings to which he adds a fifth: first, a 'modernist essay on technology and alienation'; second, a cultural and historical response focused on the idea of America; third, a focus on the 'poet's imaginative abilities of genius, in his myth of his own biography as authority'; fourth, a close reading, sometimes formalist approach to the 'language of the text, usually stressing the failure of some transcendental intention'; and, finally, fifth, Yingling's own significant intervention, a 'homosexual reading'. Yingling, p. 252, n. 10.

*Bridge*' depending 'on the coherence of its imaginative rendering of the totality of American experience, from a mythic past to the incitements and confusions of the present age'.[103] Second, the personal or biographical, is based on 'an essentially private psychodrama' which 'fixes on the poet's omnipresent role as his poem's burdened and questing protagonist'.[104] This approach can range in emphasis from the biographical and genetic to the blatant *ad hominem* attacks. In some instances, Crane's work has suffered from what amounts to character assassination and unfair moral judgement, which is particularly ironic in the case of the proponents of New Criticism who were convinced of their own objectivity and scientific method of analysis.[105] Crane's often tumultuous and troubled personal life is transposed directly onto his work. In this vein R. W. Butterfield in *The Broken Arc* concludes:

> It was just under seven years between the conception of *The Bridge* and its completion. In February 1923 Crane had been the messenger of a free-wheeling optimism, with an intermittently megalomaniac confidence in his mission and in his poetic genius; in 1929 he was a self-contemptuous alcoholic, whose erotic ecstasies had become self-conscious barbaric lusts, whose only certainty was of his own failure and loss of talent, and whose "philosophical optimism" had been routed by a more or less steady conviction of general spiritual disintegration [in the West]. The man who completed the poem shared few beliefs with the man who had begun it. It is hardly surprising that the poem is not conspicuous for its coherence, its internal logic, and its consistency of development.[106]

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[103] Berthoff, p. 85.

[104] Berthoff, p. 85.

[105] Biographer John Unterecker comments that these critics were 'writing the kind of criticism that argues that the work should be seen independently of its creator' and yet, especially in the case of Yvor Winters their personal opinions of Crane interfered with their assessment of the poetry. Karl T. Piculin, 'The Critics and Hart Crane's *The Bridge*: An Interview with John Unterecker', in *Critical Essays on Hart Crane*, ed. by David R. Clark (Boston: G. K. Hall, 1982), pp. 184-194 (p. 185). Unterecker says, 'Winters' objections to it were objections that were partly founded on his evaluation of Crane. Winters was very much a moralist, and for all his efforts at objectivity, he'd come to regard Crane as an immoral man. It seems to me he blurred his judgment of the author and his judgment of the poem'. Piculin, p. 185.

[106] Butterfield, qtd. in Yingling , pp. 186-187. Although this is a particularly vehement example it is by no means unusual. In fact, such moralising is a routine characteristic of a certain type of scholarship on Crane. For a similar example of this type of indictment we may briefly look at Joseph Riddel's 1966 article 'Hart Crane's Poetics of Failure', *English Literary History*, 33.4 (December 1966), pp. 473-496. Riddel deconstructs Crane's impossible and continually failed attempt to transcend language only to be caught within its grasp. He argues the result is that Crane becomes doomed to repeat a tragic failure and narcissistically and self-destructively turn this failure into a myth of poetic triumph. However, this view is not wholly textual, but corroborated from the biography. Without qualification Riddel opens his discussion of 'The Broken Tower' by merely asserting the

Having cast him as a doomed *poète maudit* some critics have often unfairly and with obvious prejudice dismissed or framed his poetry as inextricably bound with a 'deviant' and 'perverse' personality. Questions and lines of inquiry were problematically framed: How has Crane's poetry been tainted by the manic-depressive psyche of a poet who relied dangerously and too heavily on the Dionysian and divine madness of poetic inspiration? Further, is this inherent to the vacillations of a regressive and effete Romanticism at the core of an unstable, unschooled, and, implicit in some of the homophobic early views,[107] irrational unmasculine modernist? In many ways, the type and tenor of the objections levelled at Crane and *The Bridge* are suggestive of the divisions that originated within his own circle of friends, especially Allen Tate and Yvor Winters. These would become a series of foundational arguments which have been replicated and repeated in Crane's critical reception ever since.

A balanced view of Crane's preoccupation with epic and his poetics in general has suffered from his marginalisation and exclusion, initiated as early as *The Bridge*'s publication, on personal grounds by those he would consider his closest friends. These criticisms which confuse and conflate the personal with the poetic, contain an objectionable homophobia. They have perennially hampered Crane studies so that it is hard to disentangle the problematic tensions in the cultural and sexual politics of writing a poetics of history. On the one hand, Crane's homosexuality, which excludes him from official narratives and myths of America, has been viewed as debilitating. But according to others, it is a unique quality and opportunity to 'queer' the epic and modernism itself.[108] Most recent studies take Crane's homosexuality as an important psychological and creative barrier and impetus towards complex poetic production. They uncover complexities of sexuality as the expression, repression, and in a social and cultural context with the emphasis on nuance, subtlety and conflict and ambivalence. Not all critiques of Crane or Crane's work devolve

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claim that 'so confused with the sensational events of his last days […] it is hard to consider the poem apart from the man' and that 'it seems wise not to try to, for this is a poem which dramatizes, once and for all in our time, the pathetic gesture of a man dying into his work'. Riddel, 'Hart Crane's Poetics', p. 473.

[107] This homophobic reaction to Crane as a person and his poetry especially is characterised by Catherine Davies as the negative pole of the related trend of 'psychopathological readings of Crane's biography [which] has given rise to the rather schizophrenic appearance of what we might call "Crane studies"'. Davies, p. 36.

[108] Niall Munro, *Hart Crane's Queer Modernist Aesthetic* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015).

into the negative type of commentary and obviously some of the best biographical and scholarly work have drawn from his life and biography in sensitive and compelling ways.

Finally, Crane's desire to write an epic in such a sceptical and hostile historical situation in which epic is redundant and impossible has been the force of the assessment of the poem as a 'wreckage' and 'public catastrophe';[109] a poem which 'never acquired an objective mastery […] of the history of his country – a defect of considerable interest in a poet whose ambitious work is an American epic'.[110] And yet, we would do a disservice to Crane's poetic ambitions and potentially misread a vital aspect of *The Bridge* if we were to relinquish the term 'epic' in our critical understanding of the poem. Certainly, Crane sought something approximate to a modern epic – even when in his lowest moments of despair and under critical pressure he partially disavows the term. Whilst expressing a sceptical and suspicious view about generic fixity, he still sought an innovative 'modern equivalent of the old epic form' which he admitted could 'be called by some other name' since 'the old definition' seemed redundant or misleading as it 'cannot cover the kind of poem' that he envisaged 'except on certain fundamental points'.[111] Implicitly Crane believed and hoped that he would be able to 'overcome' any limitations and realise a modern epic in a 'new form'.[112]

## Spatial and Visual Architectonics: Monumentality of public and private memory

### 'To Brooklyn Bridge', 'The Harbor Dawn', 'The Tunnel', and 'Atlantis'

> Architecture has its political Use; publick Buildings being the Ornament of a Country; it establishes a Nation, draws People and Commerce; makes the People love their native Country, which Passion is the Original of all great Actions in a Common-wealth. […] Architecture aims at Eternity.
> Sir Christopher Wren, 'Of Architecture'

Why should Crane choose Brooklyn Bridge as the focus of his epic? What are the implications and associations for the poem (its poetics and form, its modernist cultural politics, and, finally its spiritual vision)? Although these questions have all been variously

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[109] Yvor Winters, 'The Progress of Hart Crane', in *Hart Crane: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. by Alan Trachtenberg (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1982), pp. 23-31 (p. 31).
[110] Allen Tate, qtd. in Gary Grieve-Carlson, *Poems Containing History: Twentieth-Century American Poetry's Engagement with the Past* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2014), p. 102.
[111] Crane, *O My Land, My Friends*, p. 287.
[112] Crane, *O My Land, My Friends*, p. 287.

and comprehensively answered by most critics who write on Crane, I argue that in the poetic figuration of the Brooklyn Bridge Crane fuses personal, aesthetic and formal concerns with an experience of urban space. By portraying material cultural perspectives Crane endeavours to create a new form of modernist monument.[113] This is one in which modernity's quest of 'annihilating space and time', (a concept articulated by David Harvey as space-time compression[114]) is challenged by an aesthetic experience of a counter-space. The counter space generates its own distillation and synthesis of an idea of 'America'.

John T. Irwin has usefully suggested Spengler's term 'counterworld'[115] in this context. He argues that 'Crane's poetry attempts to break a purely mimetic relationship to the external world and to establish in its place a creative relationship where conjunction or juxtaposition of words […] enables us to build new relations between the things they name'.[116] The counterworld, embodied in the representation of the Brooklyn Bridge, exists in a complex relationship with the external world, balancing a tension between its order, stability and creativity with the physical world's entropy, chaos and change. The 'counterworld of the poem is not a denial of objective reality, it is a questioning of the status of objective reality as the sole criterion of value'.[117] Here Irwin argues that Crane is registering and responding to one of the effects of modernity: its externalisation or

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[113] I would not argue, however, that Crane was in any way the preeminent poet in his choice of Brooklyn Bridge. By the time of his writing *The Bridge*, and especially 'To Brooklyn Bridge' and 'Atlantis' the bridge had already acquired and cemented its legendary status in American culture. Many other poets had written about the bridge. One example is a Cummings-esque poem written in 1925 by Vladimir Mayakovsky. A later poem in the 'tradition' is 'Granite and Steel' by Marianne Moore. Furthermore, as John Newcomb has shown, many poets were engaging with the creative and destructive elements of the new urban environment from its skyscrapers to its streets and bridges. See Chapters 6, 7 and 8 in John Timberman Newcomb, *How Did Poetry Survive?: The Making of Modern American Verse* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2012). In addition to this, of course, Brooklyn Bridge had been the object of photography, especially by Stieglitz and Walker Evans (both friends of Crane's), and paintings by Joseph Stella and John Marin. As I suggest below this cultural milieu and the many representations of the bridge were all enormously influential in Crane's own unique poetic treatment of the bridge.

[114] David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1989), pp. 260-283.

[115] Interestingly, the term 'counterworld' was also used by Wagner to describe his grand operatic visions performed in the monumental space of Bayreuth. Indeed, as Huyssen points out in an article on contemporary German attempts in a 'relentless monument-mania' to find a way to negotiate and deal with the traumatic past of the horrors of Nazi Germany in memorials reused this concept of a counterworld, this time focussing on love and redemption. Andreas Huyssen, 'Monumental Seduction', in *Acts of Memory: Cultural Recall in the Present*, ed. by Mieke Bal, Jonathan Crewe and Leo Spitzer (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1999), pp. 191-207 (p. 192).

[116] John T. Irwin, 'Hart Crane's "Logic of Metaphor"', in *Critical Essays on Hart Crane*, ed. by David R. Clark. (Boston: G. K. Hall, 1982), pp. 207-220 (p. 216).

[117] Irwin, 'Hart Crane's "Logic of Metaphor"', p. 218.

objectification of reality in a reductive 'scientific ordering of the world' resulting in a separation or shattering of human, moral values from the 'scientific material absolutes of mass and motion'.[118]

To enhance this idea of the counter world, I employ Lefebvre's spatial analysis which acknowledges the scientific rational paradigm in the organisation of space, but suggests a more complex interaction between 'representations of space' and daily life.[119] Lefebvre's model distinguishes three dimensions of space. First, 'representations of space' describes the conceptual and abstract organising models of spatial planning by the official and powerful. 'Representational spaces' are the reactionary and the imaginative resistances through appropriations of images of space and carnival by less powerful agents. Finally, combining both conceptual and lived space, 'spatial practices' involve actual acts of building and rebuilding and physical actions, from the politically charged (graffiti, tearing down or occupying space) to the 'practices of everyday life' as banal as the work route to class, race or gender transgressions and adaptation of space.[120] Without mechanically adopting Lefebvre's three fold model of space, I would suggest *The Bridge* as a counterspace exists as a series of 'spaces of representations' with its layering of physical and symbolic space embedded in the habits and flow of the everyday and the felt world of the past and present. Crane's poetic method is a response to the multiple shocks of the everyday world of the urban environment as it is shaped and influenced by the capitalist and imperial socio-economic world order. While the poem traces the progress of Manifest Destiny in expanding and mapping, pushing frontiers and conquering space, by choosing the Brooklyn

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[118] Irwin, 'Hart Crane's "Logic of Metaphor"', pp. 218-219.

[119] Jake York connects the idea of representational space with the spatial form of poems, especially ones that are directly concerned with monuments and monumentality. He argues that the poetics of space in these works are similar to Lefebvre's combination of lived and conceptual space which in representational space means an active rather that passive relationship which 'overlays physical space, making symbolic use of its objects'. Jake Adam York, *The Architecture of Address: The Monument and Public Speech in American Poetry* (New York: Routledge, 2005), pp. 11-13. Although he would agree about the dangers of the pure conceptual placeless of abstract notions of space, David Jones would simply call this the inevitable 'trip wire of sign' and part of the sacramental and incarnational nature of man as artist. David Jones, 'Art and Sacrament', Epoch and Artist, p. 167. There is no such thing, embodied as we are and immersed in language and history as empty space. Walcott has a more critical and revisionist idea of monuments, and, as I argue, in the chapter he challenges a monument's implicit glorification of colonial power, not by tearing them down, but by revelling in the bird droppings on the statues and focusing on the dew or living natural elements.

[120] Richard Dennis, *Cities in Modernity: Representations and Productions of Metropolitan Space, 1840-1930* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), p. 2. See also Stefano Bloch, 'Spaces of Representation/Representational Spaces', in *Encyclopedia of Geography*, ed. by Barney Wharf (SAGE Publications, Inc., 2010) <http://sk.sagepub.com/reference/geography/n1053.xml.> [accessed 19 September 2017].

Bridge for his monument or counterworld, Crane reconfigures the 'end point' of the process[121] in order to aestheticize it and fit it into the experiences of contemporary New York. In Crane's portrayal of the city, mediating and mapping experience though its central landmarks and structures, he creates counter and underworld. On the one hand, the poem treats urban existence as an invigorating experience of opportunity and promise. On the other, it is a place of crowds, spectacle and distractions, loneliness, alienation and loss.[122] To reconcile these extremes Crane's poetic 'transmemberment' of the Brooklyn Bridge offers the elusive utopian vision of transformation and transcendence.[123]

Lefebvre's ideas on lived space are connected to the critical analysis of monumentality. This acknowledges the often contested and intimate interactions between the official discourse of planning and public narratives associated with monumental structures and the experiences and changing relationships with the structure in different generations. While '[m]onumental architecture assumes that spatial forms can encode and communicate the values of its builders' and that their 'design will displace the deliberation of its production' and so assert a 'whole, atemporal form',[124] it is just as likely the case that the monument is challenged, revalued, torn down or simply transformed. With a monument like Brooklyn Bridge, which is not as contested a structure and more likely to remain within the national narrative of American achievement, there is nonetheless a continual re-inscription of lived experiences and cultural meanings. Crane, York argues, attempts:

> to transform the Brooklyn Bridge into a monument that will both coordinate citizens with reference to an organizing architecture and integrate seemingly discrete episodes of American history into a continuous vision that will articulate citizens with one another and with the whole nation.[125]

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[121] The Brooklyn Bridge was hailed as the end or closing of the American Frontier and the culmination of the nation building exercise that saw the mapping of space with lines of rail and telegraphs as well as the extension of commerce and 'civilisation' across a continent. See Richard Haw, p. 97.
[122] Crane draws from and develops the conventional modernist rendering of the urban experience.
[123] Crane, 'Voyages III', *Complete Poems*, l. 18, p. 36.
[124] Jake Adam York, *The Architecture of Address: The Monument and Public Speech in American Poetry* (New York: Routledge, 2005), p. 12.
[125] York, p. 13.

What is important is that Crane does not only write a poetry of representations. Yes, he does focus on the visual allure of *The Bridge*, but he also focuses on the performance and activity of the everyday relationship with the bridge and other dimensions of urban space, the streets, subways, docks, theatres, nightclubs and suburbs.

Immersed in the lifeworld of the city, Crane's epic seeks a community,[126] and in Crane's ambition for an epic poem this is evident in the desire for public success and literary fame. In *The Bridge* Crane challenges the idea of epic, as an archaic and anachronistic form as he subverts and revises epic tropes. Far from shying away from the machine age and technology Crane imbricates the very process within his poem to create an epic of the contemporary age. He claims modern poetry must 'absorb the machine, i.e., *acclimatize* it as naturally and casually as trees, cattle, galleons, castles and all other human associations of the past'.[127] By not depicting a world of the distant past in an epic narrative, Crane superimposes the past beneath a present both familiar and strange. As I have shown with reference to 'Cape Hatteras', this does not necessitate an idealisation of machines or devoted paeans to them in a futurist mode of poetic 'lyrical pandering'.[128] Despite the references Crane seemed to claim that the poem need not 'involve even the specific mentioning of a single mechanical contrivance'.[129] *The Bridge* mentions many machines, especially transport by air, boat and rail, but Crane demands of the modern poet that 'along with the traditional qualifications' she must have 'an extraordinary capacity for surrender, at least temporarily, to the sensations of urban life'.[130]

Crane's hope was to create with all the materials of modern experience an enduring semi-autonomous poetic construction. As an 'aesthetic machine' Crane's *The Bridge* generates and transforms the new forms of experience of spatial relations and re-enacts the multiple temporalities of modernity. Trachtenberg writes that Cranes's 'machines are not

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[126] What community this would be is a matter of controversy and debate. There are no clear answers; tragically Crane was never to find a safe and secure community. Some of the interconnected possibilities are a literary community which would entail a lineage idiosyncratic to Crane who was influenced by Decadent poets such as Swinburne, but which also accounts for the overwhelming presence of Whitman, and yet also includes his role in the burgeoning modernist scene. Of course, he sought a sexual community which was also essential for Crane to realise his desire for love and acceptance as an openly gay man.

[127] Hart Crane, 'Modern Poetry', *Complete Poems and Selected Letters*, ed. Langdon Hammer (New York: Library of America, 2006), p. 171.

[128] Crane, 'Modern Poetry', p. 171.

[129] Crane, 'Modern Poetry', p. 171.

[130] Crane, 'Modern Poetry', p. 171.

forms of exploitation or stolen labor power, but modes of experience, capable of aesthetic redemption'.[131] As a 'counter-space' the poem also inscribes the dynamic and sometimes disorientating movements of American modernity with its utopian impulse to conquer and expand. But it also balances the flight and the optimism of such a myth of modernity with the recognition of a darker history of violence and oppression. The architectonic action of the poem effectively suspends these tensions and interrogates the process of aesthetic and even historical representation itself. In the process, he attempts to spiritualise the machine and urban life. In this way, the poem aspires to be in Crane's terms 'at least a stab at truth' and an evocation toward a 'state of consciousness' through which 'there may be discoverable under new forms certain spiritual illuminations'.[132]

However, this counter-space is neither monumental in traditional senses of space and commemoration. Nor is it prescriptive towards modernity, aesthetics or history. It is radically open, and in fact, a threshold or liminal place of multiple spaces and times. As an epic including history, *The Bridge* neither lauds an American nationalism and homogeneity without complication, fracture and dissent nor does it ascribe to and unambiguously corroborate a utopian belief in materialist Manifest Destiny. Rather it acknowledges and incorporates these narratives of modernity into its own self-reflexive modernist statement. The notion of a counter-narrative is essential. *The Bridge* not only reinscribes the spatial relations of an urban modernity, but it retells the story of America, not unproblematically, but with a view to privileging its own sacred vision. Crane realises this vision through a deft interweaving of grandiloquent apostrophe with subtle, ambiguous significances and meanings alluding to both personal experience and the cultural and material history of the Brooklyn Bridge. This blending of private lyric and public memorialisation is achieved through a sacralisation of the bridge which draws its energy from a hymn-like, liturgical tone and resonance.

The first consideration is the implication of the deeply personal attachment and intimate connections Hart Crane had with Brooklyn Bridge. Perhaps this is exemplified best in a passing letter written after the poem had been completed and published. In August

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[131] Alan Trachtenberg, 'Cultural Revisions in the Twenties: Brooklyn Bridge as "Usable Past"', in *The American Self: Myth, Ideology, and Popular Culture*, ed. by Sam B. Girgus (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1981), pp. 58-75 (p. 60).
[132] Crane, 'General Aims and Theories', p. 16.

1930 Hart Crane sent a letter to John A. Roebling, namesake and grandson of the Brooklyn Bridge's designer and engineer John Augustus Roebling (1806-1869), and, of course, son of Washington A. Roebling who had continued and successfully completed his father's work after he had died from an accident to his foot incurred whilst working on the bridge.[133] Crane acknowledged his gratitude to the family of engineers by sending a copy of his finally completed magnum opus *The Bridge*. The letter, which alludes to the curious parallel and coincidence of Crane having rented and stayed in the same building as Washington Roebling,[134] attests to the powerful hold the bridge had had on Crane's imagination. It also suggests the beginnings of an answer as to why he would not only dedicate the poem he had laboured on for nearly a decade to a bridge, but also how it may in fact shed light on a formal structuring principle in Crane's aesthetic creation itself. He writes, with a curious mixture of deference and confident poetic self-aggrandisement,

> My devotion to the Brooklyn Bridge as the matchless symbol of America and its destiny prompted this dedication – as I dare say the particular view of the bridge's span from my window on Columbia Heights, where I lived for several years, inspired the general conception and form of the entire poem.
>
> I hope that, as his son, you will find some element or occasional statement worthy of expression in a theme, which, in its way, is as ambitious and complicated as was the original engineering project which your father so nobly undertook and completed.[135]

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[133] For the history of the building of the bridge, suitably invoking the notion of epic in its title see, David G. McCullough, *The Great Bridge: The Epic Story of the Building of the Brooklyn Bridge*, 40th Anniversary Edition (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2012). For details of John A. Roebling's death, see pp 89-100. My study also draws on Ken Burns's PBS documentary which itself relies on McCullough's work and indeed interviews him, along with Lewis Mumford. I also draw on the cultural and social history of the Brooklyn Bridge and its legacy as a representation in American life from Richard Haw, *The Brooklyn Bridge: A Cultural History* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2005). Also essential to this study is the ground-breaking work in this regard by Alan Trachtenberg, *Brooklyn Bridge: Fact and Symbol* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979).

[134] Suffering from the long-term physical and psychological effects of Caisson's Disease or decompression sickness, Washington Roebling was rendered almost an invalid and a virtual recluse in Columbia Heights. He oversaw (literally and figuratively) the next years' work of the construction of the bridge from his rooms and was indebted to the tireless efforts of his wife, Emily. See, McCullough, *The Great Bridge*, pp. 286-299, and Trachtenberg, *Brooklyn Bridge*, pp. 96-99.

[135] Crane, *O My Land, My Friends*, p. 434.

Crane affirms his unabashed self-belief in the value of his work, and poetry in an increasingly utilitarian industrial age – after all, that he affords his poetic construction equal status in ambition and complexity as the feat of engineering and collective sacrifice of the bridge's construction would probably surprise the least cynical or sceptical philistine. Nevertheless, in revealing Crane's aspirations such statements of grandeur point towards a powerful aura of monumentality which the Brooklyn Bridge was able to evoke as a cultural symbol. It is this source which Crane was drawing upon for his vision of America. Crane wished to invoke or summon some of the status and prestige that the bridge exuded in American cultural life in his efforts to write an epic poem which he hoped would have its own monumental presence and prominence. Furthermore, at least two interrelated aspects are interesting here: one a personal, even quasi-religious devotion which suggests the bridge had a sacred power of inspiration and meditation essential to the conception and origin of the poem; and, second, the multiple viewpoints and gazes which invoke the aesthetic distance necessary for the realisation of the shape and pattern of the poem as a whole.

Crane's personal attachment to the bridge is well attested to in his other letters, and the bridge is a vital mediating structure through which he experienced the joys and despair of city life: moments of reflective distance with a view of the bridge from a window looking out onto the world; a threshold, therefore, between the public and the more private intimacies of desire, love, loneliness and friendship; as muse during creative sessions of poetic writing; and, as *flâneur* in the many experiences of walking or cruising[136] across the bridge in the variety of seasons and moods from the banal and mundane workday routine to the intense moments of revelry and companionship.[137] Indeed, the personal cannot be

[136] See Niall Munro, *Hart Crane's Queer Aesthetics*, pp. 73-79.

[137] Crane's attraction to and love for the city of New York is also well documented in the biographies. It was initially a place of great excitement, metropolitan culture and potential so different from the slow almost provincial life in Ohio. Clive Fisher writes that in New York America was beginning to assert itself as a powerful nation coming to the international world with growing wealth, confidence and power. 'Here the world's finances were soon to be regulated and here, by inevitable succession, the arts assembled. Here an apprehension of America's imminent sovereignty was growing, and here a self-sustaining urban culture was developing which was more secular and sophisticated, more experimental yet more confident, than any other in America. Fisher, p. 39. New York, however, with time and the realities of the harsh commercial difficulties of job searching, cost of living, and the seemingly insurmountable task of becoming a poet in a bustling commercial capital, did become a place of mixed fortunes characterised by glamour, the enticing allure of all manner of diversions, but also marked by penury and uncertainty for Crane. Fisher notes that Crane began to express a 'growing ambivalence' about New York which had been a 'wonderland but now apparently a place of trial, fascinating still but exacting', when he writes to Wilbur Underwood: '"To one in my situation N.Y. is a

separated from his experience of the bridge even when it is refined and transposed into verse through a veil of anonymity.[138] It was to his lover Emil Opffer that Crane would say in a flight reminiscent of an Elizabethan metaphysical conceit that, 'The whole world is a bridge'; and, it was with Opffer that Crane lived at 110 Columbia Heights, Brooklyn.[139] Crane's early inspiration for the poem and for the bridge are inextricably linked to his discovery of love and erotic pleasure. Crane describes this affair and his time in Brooklyn – 'in the shadow of that bridge' – in a letter to Waldo Frank interfused with the religious zeal and passion of sensuality which is rendered divine. With Opffer Crane has felt the 'Word made Flesh' and has been 'changed and transubstantiated as anyone is who has asked a question and been answered'.[140] Most importantly he finds in the giving and receiving of love, and the acknowledgement of 'freedom and life', to be embodied in the 'ecstasy of walking hand in hand across the most beautiful bridge in the world, the cables enclosing us and pulling us upward in such a dance as I have never walked and never can walk with another'.[141] The Brooklyn Bridge offers Crane the rare moment of ecstatic love with both the risk and thrill of expressing it in a public space. It is an erotic crossing and space of transgression and joy. The language of this experience will permeate the opening and closing sections of *The Bridge*.[142]

In *The Bridge*, the lyrical aubade, 'The Harbour Dawn' expresses the intimacy of such an experience. Like his letters, Crane conveys the serenity and peace of the location above and away from the bustle of business and commotion of Manhattan. The room with its bed,

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series of exposures intense and rather savage. […] New York handles one roughly but presents also more remedial recess – more enchanting vistas than any other American location I know of"'. Fisher, 83. Fisher holds New York responsible for both the inspiration as well as the death of Crane's poetic dreams, indeed a precursor to his actual death. So, '[a]though cumulatively only a small amount of his short life was spent in the city it pervades his poetry because it commanded his memory and imagination'; New York was an 'immensity, a place of inspiration' for Crane who 'found a lyricism in the streets' but this turned and 'he grew to fear and loathe' the city until 'he finally abandoned hope' and 'he became one of the casualties of a despair that matched his initial exhilaration'. Fisher, p. 173.

[138] Perhaps we note these connections advisedly. Crane himself did not intend that the poem be read as a personal statement. Although realising its 'impossibility', Crane ascribed to his poetry an impersonality of the poet that would allow the poem to speak for itself as an art object: 'I would like to establish it as free from my own personality as from any chance evaluation on the reader's part'. Crane, 'General Aims and Theories', p. 16.

[139] Crane, *O My Land, My Friends*, p. 144. The quotation comes from an interview with Emil Opffer aged 80. Helge Normann Nilsen, 'Memories of Hart Crane: A Talk with Emil Opffer', *Hart Crane Newsletter* (Summer 1978), pp. 8-15.

[140] Crane, *O My Land, My Friends*, pp. 186-187.

[141] Crane, *O My Land, My Friends*, p. 187.

[142] See Langdon Hammer, pp. 191-193.

and icy window which 'goes blond slowly' is at once a particular room in the city and, as indicated by the marginal glosses, the recollection of the entire continent figured as the embodied incarnation of Pocahontas.[143] The frontier is withdrawn within the walls of the room and mapped onto the body of the lover. Pocahontas's absence is recreated in a 'waking dream to merge your seed' as a mysterious presence is 'the flesh our feet have moved upon'.[144] Overlaid as it is with mythical and historical allusions, the bedroom scene in the early waking moments as the lovers lie in an erotic embrace evokes with immediacy the sounds of the city which '[s]ing to us, stealthily weave us into day'.[145] Crane portrays the dreamlike quality of the suspension between sleep and waking by describing the sounds as 'fog-insulated: | Gongs in white surplices, beshrouded wails', and yet the '[s]oft sleeves of sound' are distinct.[146] The noises of boats, sirens and gongs, trucks, engines and stevedores are filtered by virtue of the room's relative seclusion with the fluid delicacy characteristic of the drowsy coming to consciousness. The liminality of the scene opens consciousness to a fluidity of time. The scene is both epic with the allusions to Dante – 'midway in your dream' – and Homer – the sirens, and the line 'From Cyclopean towers across Manhattan waters' – but also a lyrical performance of song, erotic and liturgical.[147] With its references to the influences of Whitman, Baudelaire, its re-writing of Eliot's fog of the 'Unreal City' and the

[143] Crane, 'The Harbour Dawn', *Hart Crane's 'The Bridge'*, l. 23, p. 32.
[144] Crane, 'The Harbour Dawn', pp. 22-25. This interleafing of an erotic encounter with a mythologised national history of American expansion over four hundred years inaugurates Crane's mythical structure which is the basis of 'The River' and 'The Dance'. This highly controversial use of the figure of Pocahontas to represent the continent appropriates colonial tropes and myths of the feminised landscape and continues the myth of the 'disappearing Indian', so convenient not only to early conquest narratives but also the twentieth century figuration and elision of the continuing plight of native Americans. These images and mythemes are at best part of a sentimentalised and romanticised invocation of a spiritual aspect of America to be protected and rediscovered (Waldo Frank is influential here). They form part of a wider anthropological turn in modernism and use of primitivism. At worst Crane appropriates cultural stereotypes unreflectively and perpetuates sloppy misunderstandings of the nuances of Native American cultures, all as a counter-discourse of myth, cultural purity and natural harmony opposing modernity's cultural malaise. For more about the use of the Native American in Crane's work see Jared Gardner, '"Our Native Clay": Racial and Sexual Identity and the Making of Americans in *The Bridge*', *American Quarterly*, 44. 1 (March 1992), pp. 24-50, and Gordon A. Tapper, The *Machine that Sings: Modernism, Hart Crane, and the Culture of the Body* (London: Routledge, 2006).
[145] Crane, 'The Harbor Dawn', l. 22, p. 22. In his analysis of this poem Michael Trask argues that the poem enacts not merely an antithetical but an ambiguous relation between the outside noises indicating class and masculine labour and the homo-erotic bond in the room. Michael Trask, Cruising Modernism: Class and Sexuality in American Literature and Social Thought (London: Cornell University Press, 2003), pp. 127-129.
[146] Crane, 'The Harbor Dawn', l. 2-3, l. 11, p. 21.
[147] Crane, 'The Harbor Dawn', l. 2, p. 21, l. 32, p 24.

'Preludes', the space enshrines a poetic and spiritual consummation engendering the poet's own epic perpetuity.[148]

Crane referred to immediacy of description and transformative power of the sublime in the gaze from the window as being similar to a moment of epiphany in a previous poem ('Faustus and Helen'):

> […] it's like the moment of communion with the 'religious gunman' in my 'F and H'. […] And there is all the glorious dance of the river directly beyond the back of the window of the room […] the ships, the harbour, and skyline of Manhattan, midnight, morning or evening, – rain, snow or sun, it is everything from mountains to the walls of Jerusalem and Nineveh, and all related in actual contact with the changelessness of the many waters that surround it.[149]

Crane's view of the bridge is spatial as it records features of New York, yet it alludes to, indeed transposes the scene into temporal terms. His description of the river which owes as much to the Old Testament as it does to Crane's reading of William Blake evokes the particular movements and time of day or season with a sense of the timelessness and mythic history – both elements become significant tensions within his poem. However, it is the panoramic gaze which lends his view the depth and range necessary for an epic poem which traverses space and time and links ideas together.

Crane relates the scene to his mother in a subsequent letter in less prosaic terms but with a close painterly and perceptive attention to detail:

> Everytime one looks at the harbour and the NY skyline across the river it is quite different, and the range of atmospheric effects is endless. But at twilight on a foggy evening […] it is beyond description. Gradually the lights in the enormously tall buildings begin to flicker through the mist. There was a great cloud enveloping the top of the Woolworth tower, continually being crossed by the twinkling mast and

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[148] Niall Munro emphasises that these interior spaces in Crane's work are demonstrably 'queer' spaces in which Crane creates secluded, but not 'stigmatised', 'subcultural spaces within modernity and gives individuals within those spaces legitimate voice'. Munro, *Hart Crane's Queer Modernist Aesthetic*, p. 64.
[149] Crane, *O My Land, My Friends*, p. 187.

> deck of lights of little tugs scudding along, freight rafts, and occasional liners starting outward. Look far to your left toward Staten Island and there is the statue of Liberty, with that remarkable lamp of hers that makes her seen for miles. And up at the right Brooklyn Bridge, the most superb piece of construction in the modern world, I'm sure, with strings of light crossing it like glowing worms as the Ls and surface cars pass each other going and coming. It is particularly fine to feel the greatest city in the world from enough distance, as I do here, to see its larger proportions. When you are actually in it you are often too distracted to realise its better and more imposing aspects.[150]

In the midst of an elusive fluid twilight beauty, the fundamental aspect of the bridge is its view in its entirety – as a constructed whole. It validates a commanding perspective of the city from a sublime distance, as opposed to the shocks of the fragmented immersion in the city street. Whilst Crane hopes it encapsulates and represents a complex totality of a great world city, the Brooklyn Bridge also provides the relational means for a subjective comprehension of other sites and events in a city marked by the rhythms of everyday life and constantly fluctuating seasons which are themselves embedded in an emerging urbanised global socio-economic system. Not a passive observer though, from his fixed vantage point, through an active process of cartographic observational abstraction and artistic sublimation, Crane is able to observe[151] and mark the finite details and movements of activity so as to both map or order and link as well as direct the eye, alter and artistically render the scene before him. The Brooklyn Bridge (at the time still impressive in the New York skyline) provides the organising principle for him to orient and co-ordinate what was in reality a growing chaos and confusing sprawl of rapid transit and flows of people and goods in a busy metropolis. Crane translates his view in a moment of awe and omniscience, and describes the city as harmonious and beautiful rather than alienating and distracting.

In 'To Brooklyn Bridge', however, Crane fuses both the distant panoramic view of the Brooklyn Bridge as a grand monument with the bustle of everyday activity of life in the city.

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[150] Crane, *O My Land, My Friends*, p. 190.

[151] Jonathan Crary has investigated in his exposition and uncovering the history of vision as it evolved in the nineteenth century. *Techniques of the Observer: On Vision and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1990).

These sweeping changes in perspective characterise the opening of the poem, which is both apostrophe and epic invocation of the muse:

> How many dawns, chill from his rippling rest
> The seagull's wings shall dip and pivot him,
> Shedding white rings of tumult, building high
> Over the chained bay waters Liberty – [152]

The flying movements of the seagull are connected to the gathering energy and creative or constructive power of the verse-structure Crane is building. As the view of the bird is an imagined and longed for perspective above and beyond the city, it necessarily reveals a tension, reflected formally in the enjambment and dash – a sign of a gap and a carrying over – between freedom and constraint, movement and stasis. It is not sustainable and the poem has to fly into action. The poem blends the graceful gliding and bird's eye view with the busy movements of the eyes working in atomised offices attending to abstract commercial figures. Deftly Crane directs the movements of eye and sense into metaphor, as the bird flies out of view and the imagery segues seamlessly through ships and sails, to the paper and accountings of an office day job ending in the sudden drop of the elevator into night.

> Then, with inviolate curve, forsake our eyes
> As apparitional as sails that cross
> Some page of figures to be filed away;
> – Till elevators drop us from our day . . . [153]

The movements and rhythms of the city are evoked though a fusion of isolation and crowd patterns. In a description, just as resonant a century later, city life is mediated in an illusory flickering of cinema screens simulating community. Communication is not directly shared but mediated as messages are secret, '[n]ever disclosed', but repeated and deferred, 'Foretold to other eyes on the same screen'.[154] Opposed to the mass spectacle of simulated

[152] Hart Crane, 'To Brooklyn Bridge', *Hart Crane's 'The Bridge'*, l. 1-4, p. 1.
[153] Crane, 'To Brooklyn Bridge', l. 5-9, p. 2.
[154] Crane, 'To Brooklyn Bridge', l. 9-12, p. 2.

reality or immersed in the 'the panoramic sleights' of Plato's Cave,[155] it is the Brooklyn Bridge which stands and offers aesthetic and religious vision. Crane describes it in the poem with language of praise and worship. The bridge is able to contain paradox and balance, opposites of stillness and motion, energy and structure:

> And Thee, across the harbour, sliver-paced
> As though the sun took step of thee, yet left
> Some motion ever unspent in the stride, –
> Implicitly thy freedom staying thee![156]

The apotheosis of the inanimate bridge into a god-like form contrasts with the activities of the disorderly and chaotic city. The relationship with the Bridge is one of 'I-Thou'; a holy communion of the many into the one. The relationship between bodies in the city is between fragmentary parts; disjunction and disruption preclude the possibility of meaningful union. The metropolis drives the immediate loss of the poem's epic hero, an anonymous bedlamite's suicide.[157] It is a space described with a surreal and violent jagged edge as under construction and constant movement:

> Down Wall, from girder into street noon leaks,

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[155] For a more in-depth reading of Crane's use of and relationship with Platonism which relates directly to *The Bridge*, see Joseph J. Arpad, 'Hart Crane's Platonic Myth: The Brooklyn Bridge', *American Literature*, 39.1 (March 1967), pp. 75-86.

[156] Crane, 'To Brooklyn Bridge', l. 13-16, p. 2. As discussed below, this fusion of opposites which was part of Roebling's philosophical conception of the Brooklyn Bridge, has been part of the representation of its technical and engineering achievement since its construction. One of the speakers at the controversial fiasco of the opening ceremony, Abram S. Hewitt claimed that the Bridge was an example of the highest order of 'organized intelligence' which meant that the Brooklyn Bridge,

> looks like a motionless mass of masonry and metal; but as a matter of fact it is instinct with motion. There is not a particle of matter in it which is at rest even for the minutest portion of time. It is an aggregation of unstable elements, changing with every change in the temperature and every movement of the heavenly bodies. The problem was, out of these unstable elements to produce absolute stability.

Hewitt, qtd. in Trachtenberg, *Brooklyn Bridge*, p. 123.

[157] Although there is a reference in the pun on 'jest' to 'gest' or heroic action, Crane could be referencing the famous case of a hoax jumper, Steve Brodie. As an indication of the Brooklyn Bridge's ability to capture the imagination of the public in mythical and morbid ways, Richard Haw cites this as one of the more instructive myths about the bridge – the other being that it has been frequently sold in jest to gullible tourists. Richard Haw, pp. 145-150. In reality a noted site for suicides, the Brooklyn Bridge was also used in Dos Passos's novel *Manhattan Transfer*.

A rip-tooth of the sky's acetylene;
All afternoon the cloud-flown derricks turn . . .[158]

Elsewhere in the poem, especially in the 'The Tunnel', Crane portrays the more disorienting and fragmentary rhythms of city life, whilst still suggesting its energy, allure and exhilaration. Borrowing heavily from Eliot and other modernist evocations of city spaces, there are a myriad of opportunities for the restless:

Performances, assortments, résumés –
Up Times Square to Columbus Circle lights
Channel the congresses, nightly sessions,
Refractions of the thousand theatres, faces –
Mysterious kitchens. … You shall search them all.[159]

In the depths of the underworld with 'subways, rivered under streets', the poet hears echoes and fragments of speech and conversation amongst the living dead whose 'tongues recant like beaten weather vanes' while the movement of the train induces a nightmarish reverie and meeting of Edgar Allan Poe's 'head […] swinging from the swollen strap'.[160] This is a re-writing of the *katabasis* so common to epic.

In contrast, the Brooklyn Bridge, however, is a calm and serene, if not ambiguous celestial presence promising uncertain rewards and yet immortalising anonymous humanity with '[v]ibrant reprieve and pardon'.[161] As a construction which is '[s]leepless as the river' and which '[v]aulting the sea' the bridge transcends space to become a modernist secular cathedral which unites the pastoral and the mechanical. Evoking a myth of American unity, Crane at his most hopeful uses the Brooklyn Bridge to signify a collective vision of America, thereby unifying land and people from the expanses of America's 'prairies dreaming sod' to 'us lowliest' in the city.[162] This scene is expressive of 'Crane's pursuit of a purified medium

[158] Crane, 'To Brooklyn Bridge', l. 21-23, p. 3.
[159] Crane, 'The Tunnel', *Hart Crane's 'The Bridge'*, l. 1-5, p. 113. For a reading of 'The Tunnel' in relation to urban modernism and the myth of the underworld see Sunny Stalter-Pace, where she argues for Crane's more innovative exploration of the recuperative and re-imaginative possibilities of the experience in the subway.
[160] Crane, 'The Tunnel', l. 33, p. 115, l. 47, p. 116.
[161] Crane, 'To Brooklyn Bridge', l. 25-28, p. 3.
[162] Crane, 'To Brooklyn Bridge', l. 42-43, p. 5.

of communication, of a language that would bind together the many voices of American history and provide the basis for a new community'.[163] Rather than the fractured speech of the subway riders on their timetabled routines, Crane imagines the bridge's harmonising

> Unfractioned idiom, immaculate sigh of stars,
> Beading thy path – condense eternity.[164]

The bridge is an architectural form which is also an art object to be viewed. Brooklyn Bridge 'belongs first to the eye'.[165] But which eyes? And looking at what view? Crane modulates the regimes of sight using references from the mechanical (photographic and to the cinematic) to the painterly and surreal.[166] However, there are at base two contrasting 'views' of bridge and the city: one sublime and commanding the totality, and the other immediate, blurred and quick immersed in the city, either on the bridge, enveloped by its cables or beneath it the shadow of the towers. Of these 'views', which inform much of Crane's depiction of the Brooklyn Bridge in the opening and closing poems, Richard Haw distinguishes between the 'magisterial gaze' and 'reverential gaze'.[167] From the top of the towers of the bridge which offered a height and view of the city in its entirety previously only available by air, the photographer Joshua Beal was able to capture panoramic views which offered New Yorkers a new perspective of their city.[168] Being 'both personal and

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[163] Hammer, p. 186.
[164] Crane, 'To Brooklyn Bridge', l. 34-35, p. 4.
[165] Alan Trachtenberg, *Brooklyn Bridge: Fact and Symbol* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), p. 3.
[166] To illustrate this dynamic Crane's comments on the impressionist techniques in 'General Aims' which adumbrates the key notion of 'seeing through', a power that Crane views as integral to the spatial and visual nature of *The Bridge*. First, profoundly influenced by his reading and love for Romantic poets Crane was never solely focussed on a reproductive and mimetic art. Realising the power of photography which had in the nineteenth century begun to usurp the role of realist representational strategies and cognisant of the necessity for new modes of seeing in modernity, Crane was careful to emphasise the spiritual value and activity implicit in poetic vision. He argues, perhaps misunderstanding the movement and conflating the term with something more akin to a type of realism, that the 'impressionist is interesting as far as he goes' but that in the modern world 'merely referring frequently to skyscrapers, radio antennae, steam whistles, or other surface phenomena of our time is merely to paint a photograph'. Crane, 'General Aims and Theories', p. 14. Co-opting the Platonic myth of copied forms which the philosopher used to denounce poets, Crane here argues using the new language of techniques of film and photography that the impressionist's 'goal has been reached when he has succeeded in projecting certain selected factual details into his reader's consciousness'. Crane, 'General Aims and Theories', p. 15. Again, perhaps unfairly, Crane denounces the impressionist who is not 'interested in causes (metaphysical) of his materials, their emotional derivations or their utmost spiritual consequences'. Crane, 'General Aims and Theories', p. 15.
[167] Haw, pp. 92-114.
[168] Haw, p. 99.

distinctly ideological', the magisterial gaze united 'past, present and future, synchronically plotting the course of empire' and is 'commensurate with the national ideology of Manifest Destiny'.[169] The 'reverential gaze' was part of the evolving grand style but involved a dramatic shift in perspective from high or above to below so that the towers and cables would loom over the viewers.[170] This view, Haw argues, has dominated the visual history of the Brooklyn Bridge and would be part of the repertoire of influential photographers and artists such as Alfred Stieglitz and, Crane's close friend, Walker Evans.[171] The bridge was already part of public imagination and with a history of representations. Crane draws from these established visual codes and conventions and blends them with his already naturally visual imagination to add depth to his depiction of the Brooklyn Bridge.

Moreover, he uses these images to give the entire poem a shape and form. Such a view of the bridge from a distance is conveyed specifically in the terms of construction and architecture. Crane writes to Otto Kahn describing this as an 'architectural method', and frequently uses metaphors of construction and scaffolding to describe the formal aspects of the work.[172] The Brooklyn Bridge's span and structure give shape to the entire poem. This can be seen perhaps on a superficial level: the towers correspond to the introductory and closing poems which bookend the whole poem. Indeed, more than a few critics have mentioned the similarity in construction of the towers first and Crane's composition of the opening and concluding poems at the very beginning of composition – the rest of the construction of the poem involves the arduous linking and connecting of the two primary structures.[173]

Crane consistently links his poetic aims directly to his appreciation of the visual arts. Crane explicitly states that whilst 'poetry has at once a greater intimacy and a wider scope of implication than painting or any of the other arts', he accedes that 'literature has a more

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[169] Haw, p. 99.

[170] The reverential gaze has its own aesthetic and ideological implications. Haw cites Albert Boime:

> 'The reverential gaze moves upward from the lower picture plane and culminates on or near a distant mountain peak. […] The reverential gaze signified the striving of vision toward a celestial goal in the heavens, starting from a wide, panorama base. […] The convergence of the line of vision on the celestial focal point metaphorically implied the yearning for the unity of the German nation under God'. Boime, qtd. in Haw, p. 105.

[171] Walker Evans provided the photograph for the first edition of *The Bridge*. See Haw, pp. 117-123.

[172] Crane, *O My Land, My Friends*, p. 346.

[173] For a genetic study of the poem's development see Edward Brunner, *Splendid Failure: Hart Crane and the Making of 'The Bridge'* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1985).

tangible relationship to painting' and Crane speculates that there was a mutual influence and development of the movements of Symbolism and impressionism towards 'abstract statement and metaphysical speculations'.[174] In addition to his friends who were artists including William Sommer,[175] Crane refers to works by El Greco,[176] Joseph Stella and others as essential to his visualisation of the form of *The Bridge*. More specifically and in one most significant instance, he refers to *The Bridge* in its entirety as analogous to the Sistine Chapel.[177] This compositional method was noted as early as Crane's foremost biographer John Unterecker who, writing against the criticisms of Tate, Winters, Blackmur et al., emphasised the coherence and structural unity of the poem. Unterecker argued that Crane looked to the watercolours of Sommer and John Marin 'to find analogous structures – great blocks of color held together by the echoing pattern of a superimposed linking design'.[178] Furthermore, John T. Irwin who has written illuminatingly on this pictorial and poetic aspect of Crane's work has shown convincingly that in addition to the fact that in his letters 'Crane's references to paintings and visual artists outnumber his references to music and composers five to one' in all his 'prose descriptions of the poem's overall structure Crane drew his comparisons almost exclusively from the visual arts'.[179] These points are not merely statistical or even rhetorical but profoundly integral to the conception of 'Crane's symbolic bridge' which is the 'structure meant to represent the fusion of time and space […] in a visionary synthesis'.[180]

At the core of these accounts of Crane's poetic method is a predominantly visual approach in which the optical sensory mode is extended as a means to make metaphysical and ontological claims of a spiritual nature all the whilst being embodied in human activities of seeing and walking. The spiritual eye meets what Trachtenberg has called the 'kinetic eye'. He writes, that '[p]ossessed by the kinetic eye' enabled by the 'motion, the walk, the

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[174] Crane, 'Modern Poetry', p. 171.
[175] Biographer Philip Horton notes that Crane's brief apprenticeship under William Sommer 'served to sharpen and crystallize his awareness of the possibilities in his own medium' and that this influenced Crane's 'primarily plastic' attitude towards language and words which he 'considered not as vehicles of thought so much as bodies of the impalpable substance of language to be moulded into aesthetically self-sufficient and complete unit'. Philip Horton, qtd. in Irwin, *Hart Crane's Poetry*, pp. 3-4.
[176] See Crane, *O My Land, My Friends*, pp. 263-264 and Irwin's commentary, *Hart Crane's Poetry*, pp. 36-40.
[177] Crane, *O My Land, My Friends*, p. 346.
[178] John Unterecker, 'The Architecture of the Bridge', in *Hart Crane: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. by Alan Trachtenberg (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1982), pp. 80-96 (p. 82).
[179] Irwin, *Hart Crane's Poetry*, p. 4.
[180] Irwin, *Hart Crane's Poetry*, p. 4.

crossing into a visionary vision' the bridge is 'transfigured': it is 'not merely an object, but also a subject, a Thee'.[181]

Crane is conforming to or adopting the long established tradition of the ocular power to either transcend or at least organise space and time into an aesthetic whole which illumines and gives insight into human nature, history and reality.[182] For Irwin, then, this 'practice was an expression not just of his faithfulness, as a literalist of the imagination, to the visual component of prophetic vision, but also of his faithfulness to a specific tradition in the pictorial representation of prophetic vison in Western art'.[183] This is the foundation of Crane's redemptive or prophetic vision which, in Irwin's words,

> involves the ability to look backward into the past as a means of looking forward into the future, the ability to see, as if within a single frame, events so widely separated in time and space that in real life no individual could ever observe them in a single physical glimpse.[184]

While I would not dispute Irwin's argument, the spaces of urban environment, and in particular the Brooklyn Bridge, are an equally significant shaping force in Crane's visual poetics. And the locus of these sensory insights, shocks and epiphanies is in the embodied individual subject. The impossibility of the totality of vision which Irwin focuses on is to be seen in conjunction with the immediacy of the bridge as a liminal threshold space expressing an experience of imaginative connection or 'correspondences' between past,

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[181] Trachtenberg, 'Cultural Revisions', p. 73.

[182] It is important to note that Crane is not always clear that it is only art, hence the visual, that is the primary and only source for inspiration. His rapturous exclamations on modern art tend to segue and move back and forth between both art and music and other realms including science and the everyday. This suggests that at the least Crane was attempting a total form of sensory aesthetics – all of which Crane figures in terms of excess and epic ambitions for the modern poet to include everything he experiences. See for instance his delight and joy expressed in the following letter to Munson:

> Modern music almost drives me crazy! I went to hear D'Indy's II Symphony […] To get those, and others of men like Strauss, Ravel, Scriabin, and Bloch into words, one needs to ransack the vocabularies of Shakespeare, Jonson, Webster (for their's is the richest) and add on scientific, street and counter, and psychological terms etc. Yet I claim such things can be done! The modern artist needs gigantic assimilative capacities, emotion, – and the greatest of all – vision.

Crane, *Letters of Hart Crane*, p. 115.

[183] Irwin, *Hart Crane's Poetry*, p. 6.

[184] Irwin, *Hart Crane's Poetry*, p. 7.

present and future.[185] It is clear that Crane's appreciation of El Greco and his reading of Spengler's ideas on perspective, Faustian culture, counterpoint, which are integral to Irwin's elucidation of this influence in terms of 'convention of the visual representation of prophetic vision in late Gothic and Renaissance painting', played a role in the composition of the poem. However, it is the primary phenomenological experience of the individual in the modern urban city onto which Crane superimposes these aesthetic ideas – and this experience, although mediated primarily by sight and through metaphors of vision, I would argue is ultimately a total sensory experience and as such fuses the sensory capacities often using complex metaphorical figures and synaesthesia effects. The material basis for *The Bridge* begins and returns throughout and ends in the cityscape – an incarnation of all history in the present moment of the modern subject. Crane describes the inspiration of the Brooklyn Bridge to the poem *The Bridge* to Yvor Winters as follows:

> It aspires a little (perhaps far too much!) to the famous Pater-ian 'frozen music,' i.e. it may rely too much on a familiarity with the unique architecture of Brooklyn Bridge, to me the most superb and original example of an American architecture yet hinted at, albeit accidentally; and I may have to ask all willing readers to take a walk across same to get the marvellous feeling the webbed cables give (as one advances) of a simultaneous forward and upward motion.[186]

Crane blends sensory experiences in terms of emotion and motion – and as we shall see later at multiple speeds. He figures the sublime feeling of marvel and awe which he strives to describe or induce through a combined moment of synaesthesia which fuses the musical,

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[185] Crane, 'General Aims and Theories', p. 13. In 'General Aims' Crane explains his intentions and aims when writing 'Faustus and Helen' to 'embody in modern terms (words, symbols, metaphors) a contemporary approximation to an ancient human culture or mythology that seems to have been obscured rather than illumined'. Crane, 'General Aims', p. 13. In doing this Crane realised, and the metaphor is important to his ideas in *The Bridge*, that he was 'really building a bridge between so called classic experience and many divergent realities of our seething, confused cosmos of today, which has no formulated mythology yet for classic poetic reference or for religious exploitation'. Crane, 'General Aims and Theories', p. 13. In a strikingly similar mythical method Crane sees his poetic method in architectural terms as building 'scaffolding' of a 'series of correspondences between two widely separated worlds on to which to sound some major themes of human speculation'. Crane, 'General Aims and Theories', p. 13. Note the mixed metaphors: building, structure and sound as a machine or device to bridge, connect past and present, as well as the idealisation of the classical world as compared with a secularised and chaotic modernity with no master myth.

[186] Hart Crane and Yvor Winters, *Hart Crane and Yvor Winters: Their Literary Correspondence*, ed. by Thomas Francis Parkinson (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), pp. 78-80.

embodied and visual experiences of the material environment of the bridge, and by extension the metropolis. The description mistakes and conflates William Pater's dictum, 'All art constantly aspires towards the condition of music'[187] and the quotation, attributed to Goethe (from an earlier instantiation made by Friedrich von Schelling), that 'Architecture is frozen music'. Here Crane aspires towards a purification of language and experience in an aesthetic harmony. He hopes to carry the reader along in a sublime movement on the bridge, forwards and upwards, through and beyond language. This totalization of the senses gives a clue to the importance of the layered idea of vision which encompasses, but is not reducible to, a materialist representation or seeing, but a visionary activity of seeing in and through space and time. The opening of 'Atlantis', with its epigraph signalling the harmony of the music of the spheres embodies these ideas:

> Through the bound cable strands, the arching path
> Upward, veering with light, the flight of strings, –
> Taut miles of shuttling moonlight syncopate
> The whispered rush, telepathy of wires.
> Up the index of night, granite and steel –
> Transparent meshes – fleckless the gleaming staves –
> Sibylline voices flicker, waveringly stream
> As though a god were issue of the strings. . . .[188]

Brooklyn Bridge is transformed into an autonomous object, the perfect art machine, serene and still, yet charged with continual motion and energy. And in the apotheosis of the poem, 'Atlantis,' Crane attempts to transform the historical material bridge through the transposition of space into movement, music and harmony. The bridge becomes harp, loom and a communication medium of pure 'music' fusing the ancient and the modern.

On a literal level then, as much as the bridge is a superb site to be viewed and looked at from afar, it has function and obviously is primarily a means for transport, travel and to walk through. It also carries the symbolic freight of multiple potentialities and possibilities

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[187] Walter Pater, 'The School of Giogione', in *The Renaissance Studies in Art and Poetry*, ed. by Adam Philips (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), p. 86.
[188] Hart Crane, 'Atlantis', *Hart Crane's 'The Bridge'*, l. 1-8, p. 127.

for Crane's poetic imagination. In this respect, the bridge like the poem cannot be an isolated and independent object on its own, but is an open threshold; it is a relational mechanism or machine between spaces generating connections between people, things, ideas and experiences. Connecting with what Crane terms his 'logic of metaphor'[189] the bridge becomes a manifestation or an action of the very functional etymology of metaphor: to transfer and to carry over.[190] To Waldo Frank, while he was busy writing 'Atlantis', Crane attests once again to the experience of walking through the physical structure of the bridge as inspiration for a constantly creative poetic imagination which releases a chain of significances and meanings – this time, in terms of another musical note:

> It is symphonic in including the convergence of all the strands separately detailed […] The bridge in becoming a ship, a world, a woman, a tremendous harp (as it does finally) seems to really have a career. I have attempted to induce the same feelings of elation, etc like being carried forward and upward simultaneously – both in imagery, rhythm and repetition, that one experiences in walking across my beloved Brooklyn Bridge.[191]

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[189] See Crane's reply to Harriet Monroe, editor of *Poetry* where he defends his poem 'At Melville's Tomb' and reacts against her charges of obscurity, difficulty and confounding lack or reason by offering an explication of his poetic method and 'logic'. The poem and letter were published in the October 1926 edition of the magazine. In his defence Crane claims that he is more interested in the 'so-called illogical impingements of the connotations of words on the consciousness' than on the 'logically rigid significations at the cost of limiting my subject matter and perceptions involved in the poem'. Crane, *O My Land, My Friends*, p. 278. See Robert Rehder, *Stevens, Williams, Crane and the Motive for Metaphor* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005). Especially, Chapter 6, pp. 125-156 for a very sceptical critical engagement especially with Crane's spiritual motive for metaphor and Crane's cosmic vision in general.

[190] In Angela Beckett's article the microscopic details of Crane's use of metaphor are examined as she shows that 'Crane's "metaphoric logic" encourages us to hear language's tendency to polysemy'. Angela Beckett, 'The (Il)logic of Metaphor in Crane's *The Bridge*', *Textual Practice*, 25.1 (2011), pp. 157-180 (p. 163). Harking back to the Aristotelian definition of metaphor as a 'figure of speech that "sets before the eyes" the sense that it creates' she thereby confirms Crane's predominantly visual mode. Furthermore, there is a connection made between the mode of seeing that Crane aspires to when she writes:

> For Crane, the interaction of 'apparently illogical' connotations or 'emotional dynamics' creates a new kind of logic, a 'new word', figuratively described as a bridge. Paul Ricoeur's work on metaphor helps explain and extend Crane's 'metaphoric logic'. According to Ricoeur, metaphoric logic is productive of a mediating synthesis in the midst of a semantic impertinence. 'In order that a metaphor obtains', he writes, 'one must continue to identify the previous incompatibility through the new compatibility'. Revising the Aristotelian definition of metaphor, then, Ricoeur writes, 'To see the like is to see the same in spite of and through the difference'.

Beckett, p. 163.

[191] Crane, *O My Land, My Friends*, p. 232.

By combining the technical, scientific, and an appreciation of the machine with a sense of the spectacular and marvellous *The Bridge* informs a wider cultural project described by Leo Marx and David Nye as the technological sublime.[192] This view of history and progress charts the material and technical modernisation of America as a paradoxical movement forwards to an idealised future, and also backwards as a return to Edenic origins. It is the creation of an 'organic' development of a myth of America's past at precisely the moment when 'man' had successfully mastered nature though modernisation by transport networks, electricity, and urban development.

The bridge becomes the intermediary symbol in this 'simultaneous forward and upward motion'.[193] It exemplifies the paradoxical temporal relationship that modernity entails. It is an architectural artefact of modernity and also a route towards modernity as a future utopia. Crane paradoxically conceived this future as a mythic 'Atlantis', and as such *The Bridge* represents both a break from the past and a means towards its fulfilment or re-emergence as a past future or a possibility. In order to achieve this type of spatial and temporal synthesis not only would Crane draw upon the collective memory, history and cultural myths of America to form the building blocks and cables of his bridge, but he would transmute these materials into a dynamic shape using the language of the sacred, the sublime. *The Bridge* is the site for the production and reproduction of many histories into one shape or poem which is a unity in diversity:

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[192] In his classic study *The American Technological Sublime* David Nye distinguishes between various manifestations of the technological sublime according to their context and place in the development of American industrialisation. Some of these instantiations include, for instance, the dynamic sublime associated primarily with the rapid movement of people, goods and information by the inventions of transport such as rail and steam and telegraph; the geometrical sublime of bridges and skyscrapers in which the sublime was 'static and appeared to dominate nature through elegant design and sheer bulk'. David Nye, *The American Technological Sublime* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1994), p. 77. The industrial sublime draws on the natural picturesque representations of the mill and grafts this onto the modernised factory with their formal architectural design based on immense buildings characterised by repetition, complexity and order, the power and complexity of masses of machines and engines driving the energy and disciplining of the working labour force Nye, American Technological Sublime, pp. 113-115. Finally, the electrical and consumerist sublime. Crane's appropriation of the Brooklyn Bridge to capture the myth of modernity's annihilation of space and time added to his treatment of other technological machines reveals a blend or amalgamation of these notions of the sublime: both a dynamic sublime as well as geometrical sublime capture the bridge's form while the rest of the poem, especially 'The Tunnel', 'The River' and 'Three Songs' all in various ways exhibit the dynamism of electric energy and rapid movements in various modes of transport of the urban city during the ceaseless economic, social and cultural activities day and night in New York. Leo Marx, *The Machine in the Garden: Technology and the Pastoral Ideal* (London: Oxford University Press, 1964); David Nye, *America as Second Creation: Technology and Narratives of New Beginnings* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2003); and, David Nye, *The American Technological Sublime* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1994).

[193] Crane, *O My Land, My Friends*, p. 334.

> And Though that cordage threading with its call
> One arc synoptic of all tides below –
> Their labyrinthine mouths of history […]
>
> From gulf unfolding, terrible of drums,
> Tall Vision-of-the-Voyage, tensely spare –
> Bridge, lifting night to cycloramic crest
> Of deepest day – O choir, translating time
> Into what multitudinous Verb the suns
> And synergy of waters ever fuse, recast
> In myriad syllables[194]

Finally, a comment in 'General Aims' adumbrates the key notion of 'seeing through', a power that Crane views as integral to the spatial and visual nature of *The Bridge*. First, profoundly influenced by his reading and love for Romantic poets, Crane was never solely focussed on a reproductive and mimetic art. Realising the power of photography which had in the nineteenth century begun to usurp the role of realist representational strategies and cognisant of the necessity for new modes of seeing in modernity, Crane was careful to emphasise the spiritual value and activity implicit in poetic vision. He argues, perhaps misunderstanding the movement and conflating the term with something more akin to a type of realism, that the 'impressionist is interesting as far as he goes' but that in the modern world 'merely referring frequently to skyscrapers, radio antennae, steam whistles, or other surface phenomena of our time is merely to paint a photograph'.[195] Co-opting the Platonic myth of copied forms which the philosopher used to denounce poets, Crane here argues using the new language of techniques of film and photography that the impressionist's 'goal has been reached when he has succeeded in projecting certain selected factual details into his reader's consciousness'.[196] Again, perhaps unfairly, Crane denounces the impressionist who is not 'interested in causes (metaphysical) of his materials, their

[194] Crane, 'Atlantis', l. 9-11, p. 127, l. 44-47, p. 130.
[195] Crane, 'General Aims and Theories', p. 14.
[196] Crane, 'General Aims and Theories', p. 15.

emotional derivations or their utmost spiritual consequences'.[197] And with this Crane relies on the authority of Blake when he (mis)quotes him, emphasising the key words as follows:

> We are led to believe in a lie
> When we see *with* not *through* the eye.[198]

Misquotation notwithstanding Crane employs Blake with his own poetic intentions and effect. Not simply to create with the eye or play with false or illusory appearances on the surface, Crane's poetic ideal was to 'go *through* the combined materials of the poem, using our '"real world" somewhat as a spring-board, and to give the poem as a *whole* an orbit or pre-determined direction of its own'.[199] Crane spatialises vision, and gives it aesthetic and ideological force. He transforms his poetics into both an apparatus and a questing activity or a process of imaginative perception of truth-making or seeing through the veils of illusions and lies: it is an acrobatic linguistic action, a voyaging and movement of passage through a medium (the materials of the poem and/or culture) and upwards giving the poem impetus and energy beyond the reductive limits of 'real world' rationalism. Implicit in Crane's idea is the modernist desire for the autotelic and autonomous artwork – like a planet or object moving through space, the art object has its own trajectory, arc or path. It is in this regard that the Brooklyn Bridge was so attractive an architectural construction for him. But this would be only part of the attraction and one must be careful not to suggest that Crane would reify or would limit the understanding of the Brooklyn Bridge as merely something to be seen with the eye. That would be a perpetuation of a lie of sorts, and it would not be the means through to a new state of consciousness or illumination about America or modernity or our individual existence as modern subjects.

It is clear that the grandiose claims of the power of poetic language are linked to the everyday individual experience of the bridge as a material object which itself has become a symbol of social and cultural achievement. It has a career – as in a social status and function in institutional terms. A trajectory and direction which is a convergence, a junction and a

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[197] Crane, 'General Aims and Theories', p. 15.
[198] Crane, 'General Aims and Theories', p. 15.
[199] Crane, 'General Aims and Theories', pp. 15-16.

passageway for the traffic of associations and connotations, a circulation of signification which, as in the words of the epigraph to the whole poem, travels:

> From going to and fro in the earth,
> And from walking up and down in it.[200]

There is implicit in this, I think, a dual significance. First, as mentioned above, by conceiving the bridge as a kind of liberatory space, a by and large Romantic desire and wish for a special power of perception and sensation manifested in poetic language which captures the moods, 'spots of time' and moments of eternity situated in the ordinary pedestrian activities of daily life. Second, in a more modernist dialogical relationship with his materials, 'seeing through' suggests a self-conscious ideological critique of modernity's myths of progress and advancement which engages in the social and material realities of urban life. Seeing through the eye or I is both seeing through an atomised and fragmented modern self by way of an enlarging aesthetic experience, but also a more radical dismantling and deconstructing of cultural myths and ideologies that would produce and perpetuate this instrumental social identity. In this there is an implicit dialectic tension within Crane's poem between the whole or the ekphrastic moment of stillness (exemplified by the aspiration towards the transcendent omniscient vision of the ideal form) and the process, the material flow of the city caught in the increasingly accelerated movements of fragmentary and seemingly disconnected phenomena (exemplified by the multiplicity and density of meaning in the apparent illogicality of metaphor). In order to unify his entire poem Crane uses the Brooklyn Bridge which as a site of spatial organisation and a figure for urban spectacle acts as a totalising system or focal point in the field of vision, not only in the aesthetic and formalist sense, but, I argue, in the wider cultural and ideological field. This ultimately provides a way of orienting the epic bardic voice towards a poetic statement of lasting value and worth.

However, the forces of modernity, the forward march of progress and the phenomenological disintegration or distraction exemplified by the shocks of the urban metropolis work against any complete abstraction and unifying vision which would

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[200] Hart Crane, *Hart Crane's 'The Bridge'*, frontispiece.

culminate in the fully transcending autonomy and perfection of the artwork. As a result, Crane, in a similar vein to the modernist experimentation of the early twentieth century, develops multiple perspectives of swooping, changing and shifting viewpoints to register the city in all its energy and speed.

At this stage, what is registered in varied temporalities of walking, subways, boats, aeroplanes, is also manifested in terms of spatial organisation: *The Bridge* as a monument represents in one sense a site of singularity of American modernity and in another, a node or confluence for many sites, representing and connecting or bridging the diversity and plurality of social spaces thereby opening to multiplicity, fragmentation and hidden spaces. Brooklyn Bridge's grandeur and scale is enshrined in its cultural legacy as a testament to the achievements and progress of modernisation. This is exhibited in the resplendent size and scale of the bridge's imposing towers. However, both the formidable vertical presence in the Gothic towers *and* the darkness cast by the monument, along with the strings and webs of steel cabling are figured in the poem. As such, the light and form, the solidity and presence of the bridge is often contrasted to the fluidity of the river or set in relation to the shadow and expanse of the city and landscape beyond.

Crane's sublime energy works to dissolve the power of homogenising cultural narratives, but displaces (not replaces) it with his own lyric voice. This dialectic sets up a fundamental tension at the core of the poetics of structure and fluidity of language. Desperate to return to origins or capture, in his words, and 'condense eternity',[201] Crane uses the myths and cultural materials of the past and synthesises them to a phenomenological experience of the bridge. In a bold move, he attempts to transpose this into the production dynamic of the spiritual machine that is the poem itself. Crane in caught in a vortex of forces: between the material of the real world, the urban street and bridge; the forward movement of history and the upward movement of elation and enthusiasm. This potentially destabilises and disorients and to a certain extent dissolves the facts and materials of culture. Crane faces the impossible task, and, as many have argued, it does place him hurtling towards the abyss. It is no surprise that the poem opens with a suicide, and, as many cynical critics have commented, there was no place to go for Crane himself once he had set himself this paradoxically impossible epic aim.

[201] Crane, 'To Brooklyn Bridge', l. 35, p. 4.

## ‘O choir, translating time | Into what multitudinous Verb’:[202]
## Crane’s Historical Sense

At first glance, despite Crane’s ambivalence towards T. S. Eliot as both master modernist, pessimist and Europhile, Crane’s historical sense bears a striking resemblance to Eliot’s oft quoted formulation in which the historical sense involves a ‘perception, not only of the pastness of the past, but of its presence’.[203] Crane would conceive of the relationship between past and present in the same close, intimate but uniquely ‘American’ way: The historical sense enables Crane as epiphany to reconcile past and present, history and machine:

> [t]o handle the beautiful skeins of this myth of America – to realize suddenly, as I seem to, how much of the past is living under only slightly altered forms, even in machinery and such-like, is extremely exciting.[204]

This re-creation or return of the past in the form of correspondences first took shape in his lyric poems, most notably ‘The Marriage of Faustus and Helen’ in which Crane sought to ‘build a bridge between so-called classical experience and many divergent realities of our seething confused cosmos of today’ in a kind of ‘grafting process’.[205]

However, Crane’s method also differs fundamentally from Eliot’s mythical method in its execution. Rather than using the fragments of history as an accretion and juxtaposition of past and present in an ironic and disjunctive form, Crane sought to translate history into music, finding his authority not in the expression of the enervated sense of modern malaise but in the voice of what Allen Grossman has called the ‘poetics of intensity’ which seeks the ‘promise of pure communication’.[206] Crane’s historical sense is more properly an

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[202] Crane, ‘Atlantis’, l. 44-45, p. 130.
[203] T. S. Eliot, ‘Tradition and the Individual Talent’, *Selected Prose of T. S. Eliot*, ed. by Frank Kermode (London: Faber and Faber, 1975), p. 38.
[204] Crane, *O My Land, My Friends*, p. 272.
[205] Crane, ‘General Aims and Theories’, p. 13.
[206] Allen Grossman, ‘Hart Crane and Poetry: A Consideration of Crane’s Intense Poetics with Reference to “The Return”’, *ELH*, 48.4 (Winter, 1981), pp. 841-879. See also: Allen Grossman, ‘On Communicative Difficulty in General and “Difficult” Poetry in Particular: The Example of Hart Crane’s “The Broken Tower”’, *Chicago Review*, 53.2/3 (Autumn, 2007), pp. 140-161.

aesthetisation of history through the vectors of the body and experience. Crane writes in his 'General Aims and Theories' of an 'absolute' aesthetic experience and employs organicist and quasi-religious language to point towards poetry of heightened and altered consciousness and 'spiritual illuminations, shining with a morality essentialized from experience directly'.[207]

Such a poetics of 'lyric ecstasy' could be deemed acceptable only when concentrated in the lyric sequence. Crane created controversy when he stretched the lyric to epic ends, that is poetry suited or adequate for modern public historical memory.[208] Even more contentious, Crane's use of history has been variously dismissed and critiqued. First, only a cursory view of the poem suggests the anachronistic and highly selective history of America which Crane offers.[209] Critics have roundly castigated Crane for his abuse of history: William Logan offers only the most recent critiques of Crane's supposedly shallow and superficial engagement with history when he scathingly scoffs, it is a 'mawkish medley from Show Boat and Oklahoma – you'd buy the Brooklyn Bridge to make it stop'.[210] Even more sympathetic and better close readers such as Edward Brunner have argued that Crane's 'historical references were fragmentary and negligible […] snippets from a schoolboy's textbook'; whilst Jeffrey Walker dismisses it:

> […] the American history upon which Crane has tried to force a Whitmanesque affirmation really consists of the most obvious of figures – Columbus, Indians,

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[207] Crane, 'General Aims and Theories', p. 16.

[208] I find the dichotomy used by both Gabriel and Reed which splits Crane into an almost schizoid opposition of lyric and epic unhelpful. Despite Gabriel's tentative acknowledgement that there is a 'cross-fertilization of the two modes" and that Crane 'intended a liminal relationship between the two', this split is nonetheless perpetuated in the very structure of the book. Gabriel, *Hart Crane and the Modernist Epic*, p. 3. What this serves to do, despite the best intentions, is to entrench the very polarisations in the criticism they attempt to deconstruct. In the first instance, the critical commonplace which would adjudge his lyric form as successful, dooms his epic as a tragic failure and thereby, obscures the very radical experimental nature of the form of *The Bridge* as a total work of art – a modernist epic. Second, these mutually exclusive terms, reinstate the type of critical commonplaces which draw too close parallels between Crane's apparent aberrant personality and the over-reaching of the poetic project. Doomed to be caught in a paradigmatic dilemma Crane's criticism oscillates between a series of oppositions.

[209] Most problematic and disappointing for me is the complete elision of the African American history and experience. Crane did envision a part devoted to this focused through the character of a shoe-shiner. Vestige lines are to be found in 'The River'. This remains a lost opportunity for Crane.

[210] William Logan, 'Hart Crane Overboard', *Our Savage Art: Poetry and the Civil Tongue* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), p. 170.

> pioneers, clipper ships, and technological modernity. This is the stuff of grade-school primers or, as Edward Brunner has said of chamber-of-commerce pageants.[211]

Again, a critic like Walker, whose reading of *The Bridge* is in parts compelling, finds Crane's vision too dependent on a Whitmanesque faith. For Walker, it is unearned and actually constitutes Crane's 'lack of bardic authority', and therefore Crane, relies on empty 'declaration' of such which the reader need not accept.[212] The attack is stinging but is marred by narrow conceptions of what modernist texts should or should not be, and worse, a blindness or unwillingness to accept the complexity of the sexual politics of literary creation and a hostility towards the expression of faith in poetry. In the moment of his dismissal of Crane, Walker betrays another hidden version of modernism that he seeks too easily to dismiss. The stereotypical version of history, he claims 'could be quite suitable in a Pindaric rhetoric aiming toward a popular audience' but it is 'in a modernist context […] beneath respectability'.[213] Furthermore, 'Crane's characteristic style […] violates the conventional decorums for bardic utterance' and 'his voice acquires no persuasive authority' as it 'tends toward a personal and lyric mode, revealing an ethos more discipular than visionary, grounded more in contemporary commonplace than in deep memories many-voiced tradition'.[214] Walker's attack repeats the thinly couched views of a masculine sobriety and propriety supposed to be suited to an epic form, but ignores all the energy and subtlety and even humour and pathos of Crane's account of history.

Ironically though, these critics not only ignore Crane's intentions (or don't take his word for it) but fail to see that Crane in fact anticipates this very view, and in these very terms. Crane writes to Otto Kahn to explain his choice of structure:

> It seemed altogether ineffective, from the poetic standpoint, to approach this material from the purely chronological historical angle […] One can get that viewpoint in any history primer. What I am after is an assimilation of this experience,

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[211] Jeffrey Walker, *Bardic Ethos and the American Epic Poem: Whitman, Pound, Crane, Williams, Olson* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1989), pp. 144-145. For a more neutral commentary on Crane's use of history, see, Gary Grieve-Carlson, *Poems Containing History: Twentieth-Century American Poetry's Engagement with the Past* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2014).
[212] Walker, p. 138-139.
[213] Walker, p. 145.
[214] Walker, p. 145.

> a more organic panorama, showing the continuous and living evidence of the past in the inmost vital substance of the present.[215]

Crane gently parodies his own schoolboy history whilst debunking and deflating the great heroic history of imperial conquerors. They are swiftly dealt with in passing within the poem during a dreamlike reminiscence of a school day:

> Times earlier, when you hurried off to school,
> – It is the same hour though a later day –
> You walked with Pizarro in a copybook,
> And Cortes rode up reining tautly in –
> Firmly as coffee grips the taste, - and away![216]

Here is Crane employing a dual technique of personalising the past – subjectifying objective historical facts – but also textualising (Pizarro is merely in a copybook now) and reimagining them (Cortes breaks out of the textual world into the fleeting continuum of sensation and imagination). Crane's 'insufficiently "historical"' poetics is actually part of his 'very effort to transform American history' and, more radically, 'destroy the hold of that history on contemporary man'.[217] On the other extreme, Crane is a Nietzschean anti-historicist. As Rowe argues *The Bridge* is 'an extended attack on the very idea of American history, whose obsession with the past or future has exhausted the synergy of the present'.[218]

To quickly dismiss Crane's use of history also ignores the context within which he was constructing and reconstructing a national myth. The term 'use' is very important given Van Wyck Brooks's call to find a 'usable past' for America's cultural and social renascence.[219] Warner Berthoff sets Crane's historical vision in the wider context of cultural change and revolutionary circumstances 'that made immediately plausible the idea of combing episodes

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[215] Crane, *O My Land, My Friends*, p. 345.
[216] Hart Crane, 'Van Winkle', *Hart Crane's 'The Bridge'*, l. 5-9, p. 28.
[217] John Carlos Rowe, 'The "Super-Historical" Sense of Hart Crane's *The Bridge*', *Genre*, 11 (Winter 1978), pp. 597-625 (p. 606).
[218] Rowe, p. 607.
[219] Brooks, Van Wyck, 'On Creating a Usable Past', *The Dial: A Semi-Monthly Journal of Literary Criticism, Discussion, and Information (1880-1929)*, April 11, 1918 (American Periodicals), pp. 337-341. The word 'use' has direct connections with Nietzsche's essay, *On the Advantages and Disadvantages of History for Life*, trans. by Peter Preuss (Indianapolis: Hackett Pub. Co, 1980).

from a reimagined American past with events and passion out of contemporary life was simply the wide currency projects of a comparable sort already had in the literary adventuring after 1918'.[220] The influence of Waldo Frank's *Our America* is key, and Crane is often at his most effusive about the synthesis of America to Frank from whom he seeks support and affirmation. Frank amongst others like Van Wyck Brooks were engaging in 'a prolonged national self-audit, a prophetic re-examination of American behavior in relation to its known historical origins'.[221]

Notably this was initiated just at the period of tumultuous change in the global status of America as it set up its empire, and was beset by the trauma of the war and end of a long period of the Progressive era success. The programmatic and contentious term made famous by Van Wyck Brooks in his article in *The Dial* in 1918, 'On Creating a Usable Past', became a guiding principle for many of the post-war American cultural critics and artists who wanted to revive an independent re-examination of America's past in order to create a confident self-expressive new identity free from the constraints of European models and yet still mount a significant challenge to the conflicts and tensions in an emergent and confident new capitalist nation. Brooks sought a literature reflecting the everyday life of living Americans and retelling the creative impulse in history as opposed to the fusty academic professorial contempt for the contemporary poets and the 'values of commercial tradition'.[222] Hence, he plays on the ideas of 'utility' and 'use' and creation with an emphasis on renaissance like generational agency and opportunity to construct a cultural heritage – these writers sought to counter a materialist commercial American culture and create a spiritual vision for America. As he writes with the awareness that American writers exist in a state of 'anarchy' with 'the lack of any sense of inherited resources' and 'no cumulative culture',[223] Van Wyck Brooks sums up the crisis in American cultural life:

> We want bold ideas, and we have nuances. We want courage, and we have universal fear. We want vitality, and we have intellectualism. We want emblems of

[220] Berthoff, p. 89.
[221] Berthoff, p. 89.
[222] Brooks, p. 337.
[223] Brooks, p. 337.

> desire, and we have Niagaras of emotionality. We want expansion of soul, and we have an elephantitis of the vocal organs.[224]

This condition is not wholly forlorn and Van Wyck Brooks sees the antidote in a particular relationship of the author with the past. Since the 'present is a void' and the 'American writer floats in that void because of the past that survives in the common mind of the present is a past without living value' the writer's task is to rewrite history based on imaginative and creative experience.[225] Not necessarily bound by regime of truth per se 'the successful fact',[226] Van Wyk gives his author the licence to roam freely: 'If we need another past so badly, is it inconceivable that we might discover one, that we might even invent one?'.[227] The sources for such a historical reconstruction were not to be found necessarily in the archives of the deadening world of the professors, but in an individual attitude of freedom and openness to the democratic pleasures and intimacies of creative experience:

> The past is an inexhaustible storehouse of apt attitudes and adaptable ideals; it opens of itself at the touch of desire; it yields up, now this treasure, now that, to anyone who comes to it armed with a capacity for personal choices.[228]
> […]
> Look back and you will see, drifting in and out of the books of history, appearing and vanishing in the memoirs of more aggressive and more acceptable minds, all manner of queer geniuses, wraith-like personalities that have left behind them sometimes a fragment or so that has meaning for us now, more often an eccentric name. The creative past of this country is a limbo of the non-elect, the fathers and grandfathers of the talent of today. If they had had a little of the sun and rain that fell so abundantly upon the Goliaths of nineteenth-century philistinism, how much better conditioned would their descendants be![229]

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[224] Brooks, p. 339.
[225] Brooks, p. 340.
[226] Brooks, p. 340.
[227] Brooks, p. 339.
[228] Brooks, p. 339.
[229] Brooks, pp. 340-341.

Joe Pfister describes this early critical intervention in American literary culture as a 'pragmatic regeneration-through-literature campaign' in order to,

> give modern American artists and critical spirits a sense of solidarity with undervalued (or buried) creative and dissenting authors' and to 'galvanise civic discussion of what America and its 'cultural economy' (Brooks 168-169) was, is, and can be.[230]

In doing so the 'champions of the usable challenged utilitarian capitalist meanings of "useful"' so that '[u]sable historicizing potentially functioned as an organizing tool: to help re-organize ideas, feelings, commitments, values, and hope'.[231]

Given licence and some form of 'cultural authority', Crane sought like his contemporaries[232] to distil history into experience and render it mythic according to their own creative ends. That it would necessarily involve troublesome elisions and liberal use of facts, did not concern these artists who were guided by another cultural project. To hold Crane to account to historical fact is a necessary critical endeavour, but it must be tempered with an understanding of his poetic aims. To judge him according to the dictates of historical positivism might yield critical purchase, but selective judgment might ignore conceiving how and why Crane chooses Columbus, and, instead of portraying the 'discovery', retrospectively shows the 'hero' explorer at sea and in doubt about his message.

Consistent with his concerns, Crane sought to find history within the spaces of modern urban experience. He also sought to show how history has been altered and changed by modernity's forces. In particular this was registered in his fascination with speed and multiple temporalities. Crane is both delighted and disoriented by speed, but it is the imbrication of speed, communication and capital which fascinates and concerns him most.

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[230] Joe Pfister, 'A Usable American Literature', *American Literary History*, 20.3 (Fall 2008), pp. 579-588 (p. 580).
[231] Pfister, p. 580.
[232] William Carlos William's *In the American Grain* (1925) is a case in point. Its publication coincided with the writing and subsequent release of *The Bridge*. Crane was initially reluctant to read it, but having mustered the pluck, admired it: 'Williams' – *American Grain* is an achievement that I'd be proud of. A most important and *sincere* book. I'm very enthusiastic – I put off reading it, you know, until I felt my own way cleared beyond chance of confusions incident to reading a book so intimate to my theme. I was so interested to note that he puts Poe and his "character" in the same position I had symbolized for him in the "Tunnel" section'. Crane, *O My Land, My Friends*, pp. 289-290.

'The River' contrasts mythic time with the speed of capitalism and commercial activity. Space has been conquered and commodified into the American Dream:

> Stick your patent name on a signboard
> brother – all over – going west – young man.[233]

'The River' conveys the acceleration of time by capitalist expansion which blurs the secular and the sacred into one scientific materialist narrative of freedom for acquisition:

> – and the telegraphic night coming on Thomas
> A Ediford – and whistling down the tracks
> A headlight rushing with the sound – can you
> Imagine – while an Express makes time like
> SCIENCE – COMMERCE and the HOLYGHOST
> RADIO ROARS IN EVERY HOME WE HAVE THE NORTHPOLE
> WALL STREET AND VIRGINBIRTH WITHOUT STONES OR
>
> WIRES OR EVEN RUNning brooks connecting ears
> And no more sermons windows flashing roar
> Breathtaking – as you like it … eh?
> So the 20th Century – so
> Whizzed the Limited – roared by and left
> Three men, still hungry on the tracks, ploddingly
> Watching the tail lights wizen and converge, slip-
> Ping gimleted and neatly put of sight.[234]

Crane also notes those left behind in the path of the uneven development. The question of modernity's benefits is left open. This speed of the train is in contrapuntal relationship to the rhythms of hobos walking, and the mythic river flowing later in the section. The force of

[233] Crane, 'The River', *Hart Crane's 'The Bridge'*, l. 1-2, p. 33.
[234] Crane, 'The River', l. 9-22, p. 34-35.

acceleration is further in tension with the enchanted dream time of the river. As it wends its way to the sea, the river is associated with oceanic depth of unity and communality; its final point is rendered in religious evocations of the 'Passion [which] spreads in wide tongues, choked and slow, | Meeting the Gulf, hosannas silently below'.[235]

'Van Winkle' encapsulates the complex temporal dynamic as it re-tells the story of the dreaming and lost Van Winkle who wakes up disorientated this time in a confusing modernity obsessed with speed and time. The vehicle for the rapid transition is the highway, the material asphalt 'Macadam' transfused into semi-mythical form as a tuna, 'Leaps from Far Rockaway to Golden Gate'.[236] It closes and unifies the frontier creating a possibility for a homogenous nation. Phenomenologically, the section reveals a characteristic exhilaration and joy associated with the experience of speed of the era. Crane likens it to the music and movement of a 'hurdy-gurdy' which 'grinds | Down gold arpeggios mile on mile unwinds'.[237] However, Van Winkle is a figure out of time and is dislocated. His memory and sense of identity is confused by the shock of the new. He is forgetful and cannot keep to the commercial '*Office hours* | *and he forgot the pay*'.[238] Left behind by the hectic pace, he is forced to sweep a tenement, becoming another one of Crane's sympathetic outcast figures castaway by the rush of modernity.

The real significance of this section, though, lies not in the theme of modernity's break with the old world of natural time and community, but in its overlapping and multiplicity of temporal modes in the present. The poem expresses the modulation of times: continental time with personal and dream time with social or national time. All are transposed in poetic or literary and textual time. In appropriating Washington Irving's story, Crane is able to adopt a more complex interweaving of time frames. For Lloyd Pratt, Irving's story challenges the myth of modernity's rupture or break by having his 'reader acknowledge, traditional and modern forms of time overlay each other with disjointing and disaggregating effects'.[239] In his story of waking, losing time, but living bemused and as an idiosyncratic figure amidst the new business of the village, Rip Van Winkle neither

[235] Crane, 'The River', l. 141-142, p. 43.
[236] Crane, 'Van Winkle', l. 1-2, p. 27.
[237] Crane, 'Van Winkle', l. 3-4, p. 27.
[238] Crane, 'Van Winkle', l. 1-2, p. 27.
[239] Lloyd Pratt, *Archives of American Time: Literature and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010), p. 26.

represents a perfect recollection of tradition nor the total disregard for it. He exists side by side, albeit with an ongoing sense of uncanny strangeness in the new communal space of the village. But while the village is dictated to and structured by modern national time, such as the news and timetable, the signboard above the pub, like a palimpsest, replicates and confuses the figure of King George with George Washington.[240] Irving parodies the effects of a national revolution and origins, raises doubts over 'progress' and reveals its uneven time lag. In this story, Pratt argues 'modernity superadds to existing modalities of time' and 'it is not a winnowing or a process of replacement as it involves "superimposition" and the "coexistence of heterogeneous times"'.[241] By emphasising the notion of a multi-temporality within modernity, Pratt is suggesting a challenge to the modern disembedding of time and the domination of overarching structures of control that comes with industrial capitalism and national organisation into social totalities.[242] At the same time as national time is standardised and coordinated there remain traces of other cycles, natural, biblical, cosmic, which influence and enrich experience of time.[243] Crane's poem, especially in 'The River' enacts these time shifts and co-existences of times. The tramps walk at their own pace, and as culturally dubious as it may be, Crane evokes a mythical and tribal memory in a ritualistic experience in 'The Dance'.[244] 'Cape Hatteras', the section dedicated to speed's obliteration of space and time, has vestiges of the distant past descending typographically only to rise with the combustion engine and turbines of flight which itself is figured in terms of celestial motion:

Imponderable the dinosaur
Sinks slow
The mammoth saurian
Ghoul, the eastern
Cape . . .

[240] Pratt, p. 27-29.
[241] Pratt, p. 26.
[242] Pratt, pp. 39-41, pp. 44-45.
[243] Pratt goes on to debate the next step from here: is there a harmonisation of times or are we to accept a complex and contradictory model of multiple times. Pratt, pp. 44-46.
[244] That this section strikes a false note may be an indication of the desire for, but irrecoverability of, past cultures, and the sensitivity over who is allowed to claim such a right marks the shift in historical knowledge and meaning.

While rises in the west the coastwise range
Slowly the hushed land –
Combustion at the astral core – the dorsal change
Of energy – convulsive shift of sand . . .[245]

In his own treatment of the Van Winkle story, Crane also suggests the existence of several co-existing times. Like the other sections, the marginalia gloss evokes the continent with its parallel mythic theme and hopefully suggests a hand to lead the speaker. This gloss signifies what Wai Chee Dimock would term 'deep time'[246] and as such is a sign of the co-existence of other modes of storytelling in tension and conjunction with the movement of the narrative in the poem. The hand as we have seen is Crane's device for intimacy and literary perpetuity. Most poignant is the persistence of memory (it is Crane's most personal intervention of the poem). In a typically modernist 'madeleine moment' Crane reveals the power of poetic 'memory, that strikes a rhyme out of a box'.[247] He repeats the call to 'Remember, remember' and 'Recall – recall'. [248] However, memory is elusive and fragile, unreliable and opens unconscious familial complexes. An image of his mother and an incomplete memory 'flickered through the snow screen' and 'was gone' before he can grasp its meaning'. The poem ends with the reminder to Rip to keep a coin for the subway ride that will come later in the poem. Crane exploits the tension between private time and the pace of the city. It is the '"*Times*"', the newspaper, which schedules and creates the national and city imaginary which hurries Rip along. The fact that he needs to appear to keep up suggests, as Pratt argues, that the role of the storyteller, the time of narration counter to that of the nation is being swept away too.[249] He remains 'here | nor there' and with the ominous sign that it is getting late.

If Crane portrays time, history and myth as complex and interrelated forms within *The Bridge*, it is however, his ultimate goal and hope to dissolve these into a visionary

[245] Crane, 'Cape Hatteras', l. 1-9, p. 71.
[246] Deep time 'highlights a set of longitudinal frames, at once projective and recessional, with input going both ways, and binding continents and millennia into many loops of relations, a densely interactive fabric'. Wai Chee Dimock, *Through Other Continents: American Literature Across Deep Time* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006), pp. 3-4.
[247] Crane, 'Van Winkle', l. 28, p. 30.
[248] Crane, 'Van Winkle', l. 16, l. 21, p. 29.
[249] See Pratt for an extended argument concerning the role or print in the story in opposition to the ekphrastic sign of the King/Washington and how it relates to a national American sense of time. Pratt, pp. 49-53.

moment. Not content with the ongoing tension, Crane ultimately seeks to unify time and space, and it is the experience of Brooklyn Bridge which focuses this. As we have seen in the artistic rendering of the spatial dimension of the Brooklyn Bridge, Crane conceives of walking as an ecstatic experience. So too, then, does the bridge enact a moment of temporal intensity. It is not achieved without paradox. Crane co-opts the very facet of modernity that he sees as fracturing space: speed. The dual action of 'Time's rendings, time's blendings'[250] are increased to such a pitch that it is speed which drives the feeling of the sublime. Crane attempts to reconcile the machine with the body by raising both to increased levels by propulsion. In one respect the Brooklyn Bridge's architectural form collapses day into night: it 'bequeaths | Two worlds of sleep' and the light in conjunction with the towers and the steel lines 'press […] Tomorrows into yesteryear' and perform a miracle of time travel'.[251] Crane's crescendo seeks the harmonisation of time and space and a fusion of the diurnal rhythms with the historical and cosmic. It is portrayed as if the Bridge is a time machine and likened to the 'cyclorama':

> From gulfs unfolding, terrible of drums,
> Tall Vision-of-the-Voyage, tensely spare –
> Bridge, lifting night to cycloramic crest
> Of deepest day – O choir, translating time
> Into what multitudinous Verb the suns
> And synergy of waters ever fuse, recast
> In myriad syllables.[252]

Crane is working at his ecstatic and enthusiastic best to secure a moment of visionary transcendence. But such a moment is as Crane repeatedly suggests in the poem, brief and inscrutable, and this is an essential part of the creative nature of language in time. This is exemplified by the references to the language of paradox, creation and destruction, movement and stillness. The language of verse, even inspired and vatic poetics measured as it is in time, no sooner 'translates' time and is repeated in another movement of 'synergy',

[250] Crane, 'The River', l.34, p. 36.
[251] Crane, 'Atlantis', l. 29, p. 129.
[252] Crane, 'Atlantis', l. 41-47, p. 130.

to be 'recast' in another image of multiplicity.[253] Crane suggests the existence of many experiences of space and time, but also holds out for a harmonisation of times and experience into a mystic futurity, which will be repeated in the poetic act of creation. The speaker also remains in transit, in the between space of the bridge. *The Bridge* is monument and activity. The end of the poem hovers and swings in delicate balance. It leaves the question of what will come of 'Cathay' open. This 'Pledge' to the future is not prescriptive, just as Crane's version of the past is not deterministic. What exactly this utopian dream constitutes is unclear – as he is resisting national myths of progress and linear models of history, Crane leaves such a vision tantalisingly open.

In the next chapter, I will explore a poet very different in temperament and attitude towards poetry, history and modernity. David Jones, an antiquarian poet by nature who collects and hoards the fragments of history, is far from Crane's ecstatic fascination and willingness to reconcile poetry with the machine. However, Crane's fusion of the utilitarian with the symbolic potential as he reshapes the Brooklyn Bridge to give his epic form provides an interesting connection with David Jones's particular philosophy of art. And both poets are committed to embodiment and place. While, I have argued that Crane locates his epic in the realm of the urban space and attempts to show that an epic vision is possible to express the age's central myth of the annihilation of space and time, Jones will critique more thoroughly modernity's negation. However, both use an epic and bardic poetic figure for the authority to sing of their respective places. Jones and Crane also rely on a religious and spiritual belief to achieve this. If Crane's epic trajectory of 'transmemberment' is simultaneously forward and upward, with the 'cycloramic' past revolving around him, David Jones proceeds downwards and backwards into historical time in order to lift up sacramental artefacts which contains within them the gratuitous sign of the past recalling the central redeeming Christian events of the Passion and Resurrection.

[253] Crane, 'Atlantis', l. 41-47, p. 130.

## Chapter Three: 'What's under works up':[1]

## David Jones's *The Anathemata* and the Archaeological Epic

In this chapter I explore David Jones's *The Anathemata* in relation to his 'theory of culture'[2] and 'theology of history'[3] contained in his various essays. I show how Jones explores and re-represents the many layers of Britain's geological, cultural, social, and religious history in a complex and layered modern epic form. After briefly introducing David Jones, the first questions I seek to explore are aesthetic and formal ones which concern his critical and scholarly reception and investigates the shape and texture of the work. *The Anathemata* exhibits a form which draws on a range of models and sources which are influenced by modernists of the 1920s and 1930s (Eliot and Joyce especially) but can also be situated to look forward to the late modernist experiments in open form. Jones is a Janus figure whose work most notably in *The Anathemata* points in both directions, back to an established even canonical modernist form and to the future to more radical experiments in form and poetics of word and image. As Staudt, quoting George Steiner's prediction that *The Anathemata* may be 'among prologemena to future forms', observes that '[s]een in the context of the poetics of open form' Jones is a 'pivotal figure between modern and whatever comes after it'.[4] Jones is a 'poet working at the edge of modernist poetics' who combines the modernist will to unity, coherence and order exemplified by Eliot's mythic method and Pound's desire for coherence with the 'digressive imagination and an improvisatory technique that harmonize with the postmodern poetics of open form'.[5]

In the second section I discuss Jones's Catholic inspired aesthetic of sacramentality as it informs his theory of culture. Jones's theory of culture involves a wider and thoroughgoing critique of modernity. Threatened by the advancement of a technocratic and alienating instrumental modernity, Jones sought to preserve and curate the fragile relics

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[1] David Jones, *The Anathemata*, p. 164.
[2] Thomas Dilworth, 'David Jones', *A Companion to Modernist Poetry*, ed. by David Chinitz, Gail McDonald and Richard Bozal, (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2014), pp. 505-514 (p. 505).
[3] Adam Schwartz, *The Third Spring: G.K. Chesterton, Graham Greene, Christopher Dawson, and David Jones* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2005), p. 331.
[4] Kathleen Henderson Staudt, *At the Turn of a Civilization: David Jones and Modern Poetics* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994), p. 186.
[5] Staudt, *Turn of Civilization*, p. 187.

and material likely to be lost in the advancement of a utilitarian culture. Jones called this rupture the 'break', and whilst pessimistic and doubtful of the chances of complete recuperation, in his epic Jones attempts to construct a 'bridge' through the act of art which he regards as a fundamental aspect of human nature.

In the third section, I will discuss various models which have been used to make sense of the complex, seemingly fragmentary and difficult nature of *The Anathemata*. I draw on the more established critical models of the form of Jones's *The Anathemata* to show that this conception of 'man-the-artist' is revealed in text as the integral and integrating part of the theological vision of the mass as an art-work that 'makes sense of everything'.[6] This in turn makes sense of Jones's epic which through a particular ordering of the *materia poetica* intimately connects the poetic form to the liturgy and the sacraments of the Eucharist. Jones 'includes history' and redeems it. Whilst there is substantial and compelling evidence for all interpretations of the form, I will emphasise the model of an open and interlaced form which is best described, as Jones intimates in his essays, in terms of Celtic art and a form which views the text as a collection of material objects. Two figures are key here to embody the form and content of this epic: the text as palimpsest and ancient codex, and more figuratively, the text as an archaeological site with its own artefacts. Jones's form is itself an attempted solution to the problem of epic in modernity.

I conclude my discussion of the archival-archaeological epic with a reading of two sites, Wales and London. I show how Jones chooses and crafts his *materia poetica* from an ancient history of Britain and thereby contributes to the ongoing reconstruction of an epic engaged in questions of national and cultural formation, and opposing imperial totalities. Jones focuses on a past which fuses Celtic, Germanic, Roman and Saxon material in the form of names, legends, myths and histories in order to reveal the hidden depths of the island history and its connections to Europe. The 'national' identity of Britain is characterised not by uniformity or national purity (a 'root culture'), but by diversity in many tales of crossings and discoveries, conquerors and vanquished, entangled names and origins, and a multiplicity hidden beneath the surface and buried in the landscape or flowing through the rivers and places of Britain.

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[6] Saunders Lewis, 'Two Letters Introduced by Saunders Lewis', *Agenda*, 11/4-12, 1 (Winter-Spring 1974), p. 20.

## Tomb of the Unknown Modernist:[7]
## David Jones, critical receptions between modernism(s) and religion

In this section I will introduce David Jones and explore the critical reception of his work in preparation for my discussion of his epic *The Anathemata*. In part of this argument I outline some of the reasons for David Jones's relative critical neglect, and I argue that, rather than a weakness, marginality is one of the strengths of his work, and is, in fact, a vital aspect of a proper appreciation of the contribution David Jones has made to world literature of the twentieth century. In doing so, I hope to trace the interlacing dynamic between art, religion, and, as is germane to the question of epic in modernity, an increasingly secularised and technological modernity. I will show how an artist, deeply and devoutly immersed in Catholicism, was able to create challenging modernist works of art and poetry, whilst negotiating the vicissitudes of a contested and sometimes inimical and alienating modern cultural situation. I suggest that the relationships between strands of modernism[s] including cultural and theological modernisms, and more broadly modernity and religion, which are so often characterised only in terms of opposition and negation, as a direct disavowal or repudiation (from both 'sides'), need to be reassessed in terms of a more complicated and nuanced set of relations, influences and interdependencies. Focusing on the epic form foregrounds these tensions between epic and modernity; a metropolitan modernism and more marginal and regional variants, especially manifest in the opposition between the urban cosmopolis and the local places with their cultures and histories; modernity's secularising aspect and the persistence of religious belief and a poetics of enchantment. David Jones and this study of his epic *The Anathemata* is located at the interstices of modernism and modernist criticism, and it attempts to provide a bridge across distinct spaces of critical practice.

Born into an Anglo-Welsh family in Brockley, London in 1895, David Jones, at age twenty, and after several failed attempts – he was deemed initially to have insufficient lung capacity – joined the Royal Welch Fusiliers as an infantryman.[8] Jones would serve as a self-

[7] David Jones's was introduced to the wider public in a radio programme as the 'Unknown Modernist'. See Michael Alexander, 'David Jones, An Introduction: The Unknown Modernist', *Scripsi*, 2.4 (1984), 257-98.
[8] See Thomas Dilworth, *David Jones in the Great War* (London: Enitharmon, 2012); Thomas Dilworth, *David Jones: Engraver, Painter, Poet* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2017).

confessed 'knocker-over of piles, a parade's despair'.[9] Nevertheless, he was at the front for a longer period of time than any of the other more famous war poets. He saw action on the Western Front during the battle of the Somme, and was injured during the attack on Mametz Wood in July 1916.

Perhaps one of the most powerful shaping influences, the effects of the war would remain with Jones for the rest of his life, both haunting and stimulating his creativity and perceptions of the world. In the middle of the Second World War reliving the traumas of the first, Jones explains the ongoing 'effects of war experience' in artistic terms:

> A trench lived in in 1915 might easily 'get into' a picture of a back garden in 1925 and by one of those hidden processes, transmogrify it – impart, somehow or other a vitality which otherwise it might not possess. Even a picture in the gayest possible mood may achieve that very gaiety by a mode not at all gay – by some acid twist, hidden may be in the bowels of the artist.[10]

It was from his experiences as a private that he would craft his better-known work, a long verse-poem *In Parenthesis* published in 1937. Indeed, it was amidst the carnage of warfare that Jones first glimpsed the rituals of the Catholic faith: he looked on through a door at a Mass being conducted in a dilapidated barn a few miles behind the line of trenches. In particular, it was the ritual of the sacrament of the Eucharist and the fellowship which attracted him and which would form the principal basis of his sacramental aesthetics. With the poetic sanctification of place, amidst the darkness of shelled out and eviscerated spaces of mechanised war, Jones remembered the experience in the following way:

> I found a crack against which I put my eye expecting to see […] empty darkness […] But what I saw was the sacerdos in a gilt-hued *planeta*, two points of flickering

[9] David Jones, *In Parenthesis*, p. xv. This was clearly a show of modesty as David Jones conducted himself with bravery and skill during his service.

[10] David Jones, 'Art in Relation to War', *The Dying Gaul and Other Writings* (London: Faber and Faber, 2008), p. 140. The paintings Jones may be referring to are *Brockley Gardens*, Summer 1925, *A Town Garden*, 1926, and *Suburban Order*, 1926. See Jonathan Miles and Derek Shiel, *David Jones: The Maker Unmade* (Bridgend: Seren, 1995), pp. 105-106.

> candle-light […] & goldenness and golden warmth […] I felt immediately that oneness between the Offerant and those toughs.[11]

This moving and mysterious experience initiated Jones's interest, and he became drawn to Catholicism. Whilst pursuing his chosen career as an artist, he became influenced by a group of prominent Catholic artists and intellectuals including Eric Gill, G. K. Chesterton, and one of the most significant 'mediatory figures' in modernist/anti-modernist relations, French philosopher, Jacques Maritain. He converted in 1921, and began what was to be a lifelong sincere, deep spiritual and intellectual exploration of and adherence to the Catholic faith.

Initially, in the 1920s and 1930s Jones gained admiration and success as one of Britain's foremost water-colourists, illustrators and engravers. As a visual artist, he was highly respected as a major water-colourist, exhibiting for the avant-garde British artists known as the Seven and Five Society, and achieved great acclaim as one of Britain's foremost artists in the 1920s and 30s. He also made a name for himself as an accomplished engraver and illustrator producing several worthy editions, notably *The Chester Play of the Deluge* (1927) and Coleridge's *Rime of the Ancient Mariner* (1929). However, due to psychological illness and depression, related in some ways to war trauma, Jones found himself unable to paint and turned instead as catharsis to writing poetry and essays. After *In Parenthesis* he slowly began constructing and putting together the vast fragments of poetic writings he had amassed on his obsessions and interests: war, history, especially Ancient Britain, the Celts, Roman Britain, his Welsh heritage, Arthurian myth and legend all informed by a sense of Western Civilisation as embedded in a unified Catholic history. This culminated in *The Anathemata* published in 1952. By this time fellow poets such as Yeats, Eliot, Auden and others had lauded Jones as a truly great Modernist. In addition to the two major long verse-poems, *In Parenthesis* (1937) and *The Anathemata* (1952), his poetic output consists of his other collections *The Sleeping Lord and Other Fragments* (1974) and *Roman Quarry and Other Sequences* (1981). Throughout his life he contributed actively to *The Tablet* and amassed a vast collection of important essays and articles on aesthetics, reviews and commentaries on a wide scope of literature, and significant critiques of culture and history.

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[11] David Jones, *Dai Great Coat: A Self-Portrait of David Jones in his Letters*, ed. by René Hague (London: Faber and Faber, 2008), pp. 248-250.

Throughout the course of Jones's life, he succeeded in many fields of creative activity. In many ways, Jones led quite a solitary and unsettled life. He never recovered psychically from his experiences in the Great War. He often struggled financially. He was dependent on patrons and the kindness of friends, or else precariously relying on small remunerations from his writings and paintings (he was notoriously reluctant to sell them). Jones also suffered from extreme bouts of debilitating depression and in later life he became reclusive and agoraphobic. Through all this Jones lived in equal and paradoxical measure with monastic or ascetic and passionate, joyful devotion to his art in all its many forms. He died in 1974 in relative poverty and obscurity, but much loved and revered by all those who knew him.

Broadly stated, Jones's poetic work shares affinities with modernist aesthetics: fragmentariness; imagistic juxtapositions; a complex, paradoxical relationship to tradition which anxiously swings between discontinuity and continuity, and a formal mode which prizes openness and experimentation. And, yet, he retains an anachronistic adherence to faith, a belief in a complex yet stable order of signs, and portrays a sacramental vision of poetic language, which is incarnated in relics, tokens, ruins, rituals of human artistic practice: things he calls *anathemata*. But by situating Jones within the formative tensions of modernism and Christianity, one can view Jones's epic vision as what Tonning after Robin Griffin has usefully defined as a regenerative modernist programme responding to the perceived cultural and spiritual decline of the West. Tonning discusses Griffin's distinction between a political Modernism, 'which aims for total renovation and reconstruction of whole societies to produce a regenerated New man and a new overarching structure of meanings' and 'epiphanic Modernism', one more in line with Jones's work which is characterised by 'radically experimental modes of artistic expression aiming to elicit (however momentarily) some form of intensified visionary experience, a glimpse of transcendence to set against a looming cultural breakdown and the threat of anomie'. [12] In this respect Jones 'best fits the idea of a "Griffinite Christian Modernist" concerned primarily with cultural decay and regeneration'.[13] Dilworth comments that for Jones, 'the solution to spiritual bankruptcy was not political but cultural and religious' and this meant

[12] Erik Tonning, *Modernism and Christianity* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), p. 4.
[13] Tonning, p. 6.

that '[o]nly a widespread appreciation of symbolic activity as expressing spiritual values could […] fill the vacuum at the heart of modern civilisation'.[14]

This metaphysical angst and existential anomie was not the only challenge. Jones's work must also be situated in the context of modern poetics which draws on both theological and regional influences. This is in order to cast light on a poetic oeuvre which fuses the religious impulse towards unity and transcendence across boundaries of time and community with the adherence to the local, rooted particularity of Britain as an ancient Island culture. Important contextualisation must be made, and we need to be cognisant of Jones's belated moment writing during World War Two and continuing to struggle through the post war period. Jones's quest and poetic vision is embedded in a cultural and historical narrative of Britain, and Western Christendom, which, amongst other grand Imperial narratives were being devolved, dismantled and deconstructed in the later half of the twentieth century.

In the situation of gradual Imperial decline in which Britain undergoes what Jed Esty has termed a 'shrinking',[15] the alienation of a metropolitan modernity, and the perceived crisis inherent in a cultural situation all of which seemed to erode the traditions and foundations of 'Western' culture, Jones joined Eliot and other modernists in a project of regeneration and re-imagination of culture and myth. As a source of archaic 'otherness' Catholicism and its rituals were integral means for Jones in this project of shoring up the fragments of a ruined culture into a unified corpus. In addition to the anthropological turn, then, one must also be cognisant of the religious turn – or return.

Appropriating the findings from anthropology and archaeology which had initially been used in the construction of an imagined totality of empire and a scientific codification of its subjects, modernist writers found themselves turning inwards, back into Britain. Each found their emphasis in different places: for Eliot it was a nostalgic pastoral idyll of Englishness. For Jones, it was ancient Britain. The most powerful expression for Jones is embodied in the image of the Dying Gaul evoking a noble and brave Celtic struggle against Roman occupation. This later segued into a Welsh spirit of defiance. Jones went on to immerse himself in his own Yeatsian Byzantium found in Welsh myth, and in the form of a

[14] Thomas Dilworth, *David Jones: Engraver, Painter, Poet* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2017), p. 203.
[15] Jed Esty, *A Shrinking Island: Modernism and National Culture in England* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004).

pre-modern idealisation of a unified European culture oriented by Catholic belief and art. This suggested to Jones a bedrock of a pre-modern unified European culture. Ultimately this historical vision was shaped and oriented by his Catholic belief and devotion to a sacramental art. A shattered culture and religion were to be remembered and re-sanctified through re-enchantment of place. A passing anecdotal remark from Jones's reminiscences of his first trip to Wales as a child perhaps captures this:

> This was at least the first glimpse of a visual 'otherness' and for me it was an otherness that, as is said of certain of the sacraments, is not patient of repetition, but leaves an indelible mark on the soul of us.[16]

In this recollection Jones inscribes the remembrance of his journey to Wales in terms of the sacramental rites of Baptism and Confirmation. The liminal experience of otherness occurs at an early age when as a child he returns to a lost home to travel in a linguistic and mythical hinterland suggested to him throughout his early life from the songs and stories handed down by his father, intimations received in classic narratives of the *Mabinogion* and Welsh myth. Name, landscape and site form a powerful transforming moment in the poet's youth to which he will return with more knowledge and more understanding. Faith and place leave their permanent marks on Jones's soul. The connecting bridge between an imagined Wales, a past of Roman heritage and myth, and the faith of a sacramental and religious vision in Jones's work is patent and is a cornerstone to any understating of his oeuvre.

Why, then, despite ringing endorsement from great Modernists and a rich body of work is Jones neglected and mostly an obscure figure in literary history? In her assessment of David Jones's apparently peculiarly obscure place in the Modernist pantheon, Elizabeth F. Judge perceptively and sardonically notes that the 'requisite preface to writing on David Jones is to lament he is "known but not assimilated" before invoking a parade of canonicals to testify on his behalf […] proclaim his right to canonization and to rant about his academic neglect'.[17] Despite her slightly uncharitable polemic, Judge is indeed correct, as almost every critical study on Jones is an attempt to invest Jones as one of the unacknowledged

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[16] David Jones, 'A Letter from David Jones', *Poetry Wales*, 8 (1972), pp. 8-9.
[17] Elizabeth F. Judge, 'Notes on the Outside: David Jones, "Unshared Backgrounds," and (the Absence of) Canonicity', *English Literary History*, 68.1 (Spring 2001), 179-213 (p. 179).

Greats in the Modernist peerage. Understandably, this stock introduction has been repeated in his recent revival in the media as journalists seek to ignite further interest in David Jones to a less-informed wider public that has not heard of him.[18]

As such, studies often begin with citations of glorious praise from his contemporary luminaries. Jones's most prolific and ardent critic Thomas Dilworth recounts a hushed and lavish show of praise by W. B. Yeats who bowed magnificently at a social event in 1938 and dramatically saluted Jones, 'author of *In Parenthesis*'.[19] Exasperated by the lack of continued recognition and trying to harness the power of poetic endorsement, Jones scholars seek to establish and to authenticate Jones's literary worth and importance when they enthusiastically quote W. H. Auden's estimation that *The Anathemata* was the 'greatest long poem written in English in this century' or Eliot's commendation that Jones was a poet of 'major importance'.[20] Certainly David Jones did have the utmost respect and admiration of his fellow poets (from T. S. Eliot to Hugh MacDiarmid and Basil Bunting), even when they were confounded by his difficulty. William Carlos Williams noted in a letter to Ezra Pound that *The Anathemata* was 'too much for me', and yet believed it may have value for Pound as 'something tough, but rewarding'.[21]

There are, however, complicated and interrelated reasons for David Jones's position as a lesser known modernist: aesthetic and formal, contextual, ideological and religious. That David Jones remains little known outside a clique of devoted artists and critics is partly due to the fact that his work encompasses diverse media including painting, engraving, illustrating, essays, and, of course, his long poems. Within David Jones's oeuvre the reader is confronted, and somewhat overwhelmed, by the sheer variety and diversity of content. His lengthy verse-poems are characterised by a plethora of allusions and seemingly incongruous

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[18] The headlines of a few examples may suffice to illustrate this phenomenon: Michael Symmons, 'Poetry's Invisible Genius', *The Telegraph*, 28 September 2002; Fiona MacCarthy, 'Soldier, Poet, Painter: How David Jones Became Britain's Visionary Outsider', *The Guardian*, 10 October 2015; Owen Sheers, '*In Parenthesis*: In Praise of the Somme's Forgotten Poet', *The Guardian*, 25 June 2016; A. N. Wilson, 'David Jones – the 20th Century's Great Neglected Genius', *The Spectator*, 1 April 2017.

[19] Thomas Dilworth, *The Shape of Meaning in the Poetry of David Jones* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1988), p. 3. The anecdote is regularly circulated to prove David Jones's achievement and puzzle over his lack of enduring acclaim. David Jones himself seemed to take the incident less seriously. Dilworth writes that Yeats 'proceeded to praise the work in such extravagant terms and in such grand style that Jones suspected he was being mocked'. Dilworth, *David Jones*, p. 193. Indeed, Dilworth records that Jones's impression of Yeats was not entirely salutary either: Jones recalled that the poet spent his time 'muttering half audible "bardic" verse over the tea-cups'. David Jones, qtd. in Dilworth, *David Jones*, p. 193.

[20] Judge, p. 180, p. 181.

[21] Judge, p. 181.

juxtapositions. To read and appreciate Jones's poetry is a daunting task which seemingly requires an encyclopaedic knowledge of the entire sweep of human history. As an impassioned auto-didact who attempted to assimilate and synthesise almost all of Western civilisation, his work encompasses an interest in early Neanderthal origins through the Neolithic period and the beginnings of agriculture and early civilisations; the Greek and Roman Classical worlds; roots of British heritage in Celtic myth and Anglo-Saxon history; Welsh tradition and literature; and a deep reverence for Medieval Latinate Catholic religion and culture which is immersed in a profound immersion in Judeo-Christian traditions. This is manifest formally in the rough, composite and sometimes discordant aesthetic of fragments which consists not only of obscure historical and mythical-literary allusions, but woven together in a macaronic polyglot of Latin, Welsh, Middle English, excerpts from the Catholic Liturgy, and a mixture of modern English dialects of Cockney, interspersed with standard English, military and naval terms. Whilst the works are admittedly 'difficult' and challenging in their sheer scope and range of subject matter, they are also characterised by a demanding complexity of form. The poems resist neat categorisation into genre or style. They are unusual in that they flout poetic conventions of form. A practical factor, due to their length and intricate structure, meant that the poems or even sensible extracts are almost impossible to anthologise.

However, other writers, modernists preceding Jones as well as postmodernists succeeding him, are equally abstruse and demanding and yet have been continually and widely read and written about. Jones did face an unusually and unfairly harsh immediate critical reception. This is perhaps due to a sense of belatedness and the change of fortunes in the increasingly critical reception of high modernist poetry in the 1950s. These aspects proved too great an obstacle for canonisation in a modernist pantheon already dominated by the likes of Eliot, Pound, Stevens and Auden. Jones faced either forceful dismissal or faded into relative oblivion becoming a footnote or paragraph in the history of British High Modernist writing (his major volumes were out of print for over a decade until re-released by Faber and Faber from 2000).[22] That erudition and obscurity was greeted with disdain,

[22] Richard Marsh highlights examples from two vociferous critics. J. C. F. Littlewood who writes that,

> The technical 'audacities' - they are often vulgarities - and the ostentatious hob-nobbing of erudition with a 'no nonsense' vernacular take themselves - are intended to be taken – for Metaphysical concreteness (the Metaphysicals also are invoked in the preface) and, as such for unobtrusive evidence that here is an ordered world of evident and unquestioning truths - the world, of course, of

and that Jones's work was rejected by some critics, however, does not go far enough to explain his neglected status. Indeed, the same charge of arcane allusion could be easily levelled at Eliot, Pound and Joyce, all of whom occupy established positions in the Modernist pantheon.

The truth of the critique is partially a matter of context and reception and also a wider change in tradition, sources of knowledge and culture – a problem which Jones was himself closely aware of. In the first, much of the critical work on Jones has sought to redress this problem of 'difficulty'. Jonathan Miles, in a book that attempts and successfully provides a scholarly orientation for the puzzled modern reader, writes that, 'Jones's veneration of such a synthesis is assailed by his experience of its breakdown'.[23] Faced with this 'daring and idiosyncratic music of an eclectic text'[24] in which Jones attempts to make from the 'heap of broken images' something meaningful and monumental, critics have reacted in quite mixed ways: either with extravagant praise or with harsh and/or bewildered dismissal. So, friends and life-long supporters and patrons of Jones,[25] who then inspired a next generation of critics and scholars[26] have set about assiduously collecting unpublished letters, poems and collating Jones's archive into posthumously published editions. They have gone on to generate a growing body of critical literature. This corpus of positive and mostly favourable criticism initially focussed on introductory texts which attempted to make Jones better understood and 'accessible'. In a similar vein to Campbell and Robinson's *A Skeleton Key to Finnegans Wake* (1944), René Hague, and later Henry Summerfield published line by line guides to the references and allusions in the major poems.[27] The

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> Hopkins. But Mr. Jones's assurance is too jaunty to be true, and his audacities are perpetrated in a world made safe by his habit of never becoming personally engaged - a habit which, sanctioned by his own pseudo-classical injunction against 'self-expression', has earned him a reputation for Impersonality'.

Marsh also points to John Holloway who inveighs against *The Anathemata*'s high Modernist style when he lambasts the poem which 'save for a handful of rather striking and very uncharacteristic passages, is poetically a work of almost astonishing boredom'. Qtd. in Marsh, 'Liturgy, Imagination and Poetic Language', p. 20.

[23] Jonathan Miles, *Backgrounds to David Jones: A Study in Sources and Drafts* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1990), p. 1.

[24] Jonathan Miles, *Backgrounds to David Jones*, p. 1.

[25] Principally Harman Grisewood and René Hague.

[26] Notably William Blissett, Thomas Dilworth, David Blamires and others such as Elizabeth Ward, Jeremy Hooker, Neil Corcoran, John Matthias and the latest group of Jones experts Anne-Price Owen, Paul Hills, Jonathan Miles, Derek Sheil, Kathleen Henderson Staudt and Paul Robichaud.

[27] See René Hague, *A Commentary on 'The Anathemata' of David Jones* (Wellingborough: Skelton's Press, 1977), Henry Summerfield, *An Introductory Guide to 'The Anathemata' and 'The Sleeping Lord Sequence' of David Jones* (Victoria, B.C.: Sono Nis Press, 1979), and Christine Pagnoulle, *David Jones: A Commentary on Some Poetic Fragments* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1987).

critical output soon evolved from explication and provision of annotations towards exegesis and comprehensive critical interpretative studies. The majority of these earlier studies sought to situate David Jones in the Modernist canon and were largely informed by the close reading methods of a type of New Criticism and a literary Formalism. They centred on, but were not limited to the interaction between form and content and rigorously debated the success or failure of Jones's work to adhere to a coherent or holistic form.[28] Other critical avenues were opened up by a school of historically based studies which focussed primarily on the influence of Roman, Anglo-Saxon or Medieval literary cultures.[29]

The apparent stumbling block of incomprehensible learnedness persists. The most recent intervention in this debate is from Elizabeth F. Judge. In noting the apparent disjunction between Jones's resounding validation from peers and selected followers and his unknown status and obscurity as a Modernist poet, Judge pinpoints a possible reason for David Jones's absence of canonicity in his extensive and somewhat cumbersome use of footnotes and self-annotations.[30] Judge argues that despite sharing many of the attributes that ought to enshrine Jones as a High Modernist he has 'languished in critical obscurity' largely because of the interference of his annotations which 'militate against his inclusion in survey works',[31] and more significantly which create an inbuilt contradiction which works against successful critical reception and assimilation. It is not that Jones was Roman Catholic, Welsh, or prone to now suspect reactionary political sentiments, nor is it the densely wrought, highly complex and obscure nature of the poetry that hampers his canonisation. (Indeed, these very attributes have seen other poets more assuredly and firmly entrenched into the Modernist legacy.) Rather, Judge writes:

> While seemingly of negligible import, Jones's pre-glossing removes the very qualities of 'densely allusive and formally elusive' poetry which recommended his work as an

[28] Thomas Dilworth's *The Shape of Meaning in the Poetry of David Jones* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1988) is the exemplary landmark text in this regard.
[29] See Paul Robichaud, *Making the Past Present: David Jones, the Middle Ages and Modernism* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2007).
[30] Although less arcane and erudite, a footnote would be appropriate here: Saskya Iris Jain has taken up Judge's critique of Jones's use of footnotes and pursued the case to a different end. She argues that they inform a larger and more creative part of David Jones's aesthetic craft. Saskya Iris Jain, 'Ancestral Memory, Ancient Unity: Footnotes as Poetic Device in David Jones's *In Parenthesis*', *Literary Imagination*, 13.1 (2010), 37–46.
[31] Judge, p. 182.

> ideal candidate for critical exegesis; it 'almost invites' the critics with its complex allusions and digressive structure, and then recalls the invitation by its auto-annotation, which removes the need for academic explication.[32]

In this estimation, Jones perhaps should have heeded Eliot's often wry and non-committally enigmatic dictum that 'genuine poetry communicates before it is understood' or not have provided the clues to sources and meanings. Eliot's notes for 'The Waste Land' – which Eliot was reluctantly pressed into providing and which were appended at the end of the Ur-Modernist poem – remain elliptical and in some ways misleading; they suggest, but do not wholly or satisfyingly answer any of the questions a reader or critic might have when faced with the detritus of allusion and fragment. Eliot's ambivalence and the ambiguity in his use of the 'Notes' attests to Judge's comments concerning the potential negative effects notes can have on reading and criticism of poetry. Unlike Eliot, whose work remains difficult and complex still requiring explication by an elite readership, Jones's poems are burdened with detail and become literal, laborious and onerous. The outcome is that Jones's poetry falls between readerships, and his success and durability suffers because of this:

> With footnotes, Jones's poems fail to hold the attention of either audience: still too erudite, enigmatic, and time intensive for the mass audience, yet too over-explicated, manifest, and literal for the academic audience. He succeeds in effacing his poems' obscurity, thereby limiting their utility to academics, while maintaining their difficulty, thus failing to fix their inaccessibility to the average nonacademic reader.[33]

Judge's analysis highlights the wider reception of poets and practice of literary criticism as it is enmeshed in the production of knowledge that extends to the institutions of the publishing house and the university. Jones, in her view, misunderstood the significance of universities with their specialised and professional production of readings and interpretations, which in turn would reward the poet with canonical valorisation and

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[32] Judge, p. 186.
[33] Judge, p. 187.

continued scrutiny. Reductively put, her argument amounts to the conclusion that Jones did the work meant for academics for them by providing all the sources and annotations. This had the unfortunate effect of limiting the range of possibility for interpretative meaning and scope for scholarship. In his effort to establish a common cultural heritage and explicate it for the non-academic reader (or any modern who suffers from the corrosive and erosive effects of civilizational amnesia), Jones sacrifices his academic value as a challenging and mystifying, yet endlessly gratifying (and career enhancing) trove of puzzles and indeterminate meanings for the professional academic to plunder and decipher.[34]

As one of the latter modernists writing in the second half of the twentieth century,[35] Jones was an increasingly anachronistic figure and represented much of what the new Movement poets reviled and revolted against in poetic tradition and artifice.[36] The tumultuous originating avant-garde energies of Eliot and Pound had settled into conservatism, dogmatism and splendid isolation, and whilst the second generation modernists, for example the objectivist school of poetry, George Oppen, Louis Zukofsky, Charles Olson who drew from the inspiration of William Carlos Williams gained popularity, the kind of poetry to which David Jones had devoted his creative and spiritual energies was becoming archaic and idiosyncratic. In the epic verse *The Anathemata* Jones crafted a deliberate and sometime severe effacement and extinguishing of personality which had

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[34] As ingenious and suggestive as her argument is, footnotes and annotations cannot be the sole reason for Jones's marginality. Weaknesses in her argument can be overlooked, and perhaps her assessment of Jonesian literary critics as part of cult of admirers, who resemble Inspector Morse-like or Turing-esque detectives enthralled, yet frustrated by all too patent code-breaking is merely too harsh and caricatured a picture of critical enterprise. Jones's poems do at times carry their learning heavily, and the embedded footnotes are at best an aesthetic idiosyncrasy and at worst a potentially cumbersome distraction. However, equally, and just as plausibly, a case can be made for their aesthetic value. It is too easy to suppose that Jones's annotations completely preclude him from academic exegesis (what constitutes this is itself a complex and contested and variable practice) and Judge concludes with flippant counterfactual ruminations that,

> [h]ad Jones tantalizingly dropped a few crumbs of intertextuality for the academic detectives to follow, he would have paved his road to canonization and assumed the canonical seat that his modernist poet peers tried to hold for him.

Judge, p. 202.

Furthermore, Judge discounts periodization as a limiting factor in Jones's success too quickly.

[35] Eliot described Jones as the 'youngest and tardiest to publish' in his 'A Note of Introduction' for *In Parenthesis*. Jones, *In Parenthesis*, p. viii). He also predicted that when *In Parenthesis* was more widely known and he was confident that it would become so, the poem 'will no doubt undergo the same sort of detective analysis and exegesis as the later work of James Joyce and the *Cantos* of Ezra Pound'. *In Parenthesis*, p. vii.

[36] For an introduction to the relationship between the Movement and Modernist poetry in the second half of the twentieth century see Keith Tuma and Nate Dorward, 'Modernism and Anti-Modernism in British Poetry', in *The Cambridge History of Twentieth-Century English Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp. 510-527.

been adopted wholeheartedly and even extended from his forebear T. S. Eliot's 'Tradition and the Individual Talent'. In the 'Preface', Jones writes:

> When the workman is dead the only thing that will matter is the work, objectively considered. Moreover, the workman must be dead to himself while engaged upon the work, otherwise we have the sort of 'self-expression' which is as undesirable in the painter or the writer as in the carpenter, the cantor, the half-back, or the cook.[37]

As a result, Jones produced an objective, exteriorised, obdurate poetry,[38] which was at odds with the deeply personal, and confessional lyric voice favoured by some poets from the 1950s onwards.

In fact, even given the natural shifts in taste and reception of poetry and by focussing on Jones's absence in the modernist canon as a matter of footnotes, Judge misplaces her critical emphasis which perhaps should more usefully be focused on his anachronistic characteristics, a deep-seated Roman Catholicism, an adherence to myth and legend (Welsh and Medieval Britain, especially) which reside on the edges of an established literary tradition and a sense of belatedness in a changing modern context where such a style of epic verse was becoming brittle and unpopular. These are too powerful explanations to discount, and should be invoked in any estimation of Jones's legacy to account for his apparent consignment to the academic vaults or tombs.

Most significant in disputes over Jones's centrality, however, is the misplaced reliance on the very notion of the canon and the deeply problematic conceptualisation of the underlying terms of 'modernist' and 'modernism' in particular. In passing, Judge suggests that Jones's legacy may well at some point be re-evaluated. She concedes that 'his current non-canonical status' may not be 'permanent' so that it is conceivable that more attention could possibly be paid to him, albeit in her selected area of 'genre criticism'.[39] However, despite this concession, which she supposes will lead towards a textual study of the relationship between notes and poem, Judge fails to note that this points to the more

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[37] Jones, *The Anathemata*, p. 12.
[38] This description is drawn from Peter Baker's study, *Obdurate Brilliance: Exteriority and the Modern Long Poem* (Gainesville: Florida University Press, 1991).
[39] Judge, p. 179.

fundamental question of the construction of a canon upon the unsure and shifting foundations of the concept of modernism itself. Judge does not take into account the complex and changeable nature of the categorisation she bases her end goal on: the concept of Modernism and the characteristics, exponents and exemplars of modernist poetry. Jones's marginality can more fruitfully be read not as a failure but a symptom and condition of a much more foundational and systemic factor in modernist studies.

A more satisfying explanation, and one which this thesis seeks to explore and to redress, is to account for Jones's marginality, not as a weakness or failure, but rather as a condition of an outmoded concept of modernism itself and one which has begun to be challenged in the academy. A fresh reading of Jones requires not the old attempts to revive and place a laurel of High Modernist achievement on his head, but to assess his work in a widening scope of modernist studies which has proliferated to take into account the multiplicity and fractured nature of modernism and its relationships with other cultural and historical forces, and to view Jones's work from the outside, from the periphery and from sometimes overlooked vantage points of religion, region and even empire.

Sniping critics aside, some of the most serious critiques and rejections of Jones have been the cause of his dismissal and more serious approbation. These revolve around the literary merit of *In Parenthesis* as a representation of the Great War, Jones's Catholicism, and the tricky issue of Jones's political views in the 1930s. Although an in-depth analysis of these areas is beyond the ambit of the thesis they do warrant passing comment. The first area of criticism concerns *In Parenthesis* which, whilst considered Jones's greatest work and most widely commented on, has attracted the most critical engagement, and again of a contentious nature. Most significant is its disputed role and place in the canon of poetry which emerged from the Great War. Paul Fussell has provided the most critical voice. In his monumental, and itself canonical study, *The Great War and Modern Memory* Fussell roundly attacked Jones's epic poem as contributing to an idealisation, romanticisation and valorisation of the death of millions of soldiers who died in the brutal horror of mechanised slaughter of trench warfare. According to Fussell's thesis, the Great War obliterated all models of epic chivalry and rendered heroic myth null and void. It is a mockery to invoke the tradition in any treatment of modern war – unless of course it is with violent and savage irony. As such, Jones, the 'turgid allusionist', has produced a 'deeply conservative work

which uses the past not […] to shame the present, but really to ennoble it'.[40] The very pre-war patriotism and jingoistic propaganda which served to drive the soldiers to their dehumanising violent deaths is reemployed in *In Parenthesis* to 'rationalize and even to validate the war by implying that it somehow recovers many of the motifs and values of medieval chivalric romance'.[41] Jones's allusions which 'equate these men disembowelled or torn apart by machine guns with antique gods in sacred groves' are part of a wilfully vain, misguided travesty: an attempt to 'elevate the new Matter of Flanders and Picardy to the status of the old Matter of Britain'.[42] Interestingly, Fussell peppers his assault on Jones with the same critique levelled at Jones elsewhere and by other critics:

> The thirty-four pages of rather pedantic notes at the end bespeak the literary insecurity of the autodidact; they sometimes prop up the text where the author suspects the poetry has miscarried.[43]

Several critics have rallied to David Jones's defence, and most prominent is Thomas Dilworth. Dilworth has answered Fussell's criticisms by justifiably reading Jones in a much closer and nuanced manner which emphasises the transformation of tradition within *In Parenthesis*. Dilworth argues that Fussell fails to see how 'the poet selects from and redefines tradition, and how tone controls the meaning of its evocation'.[44] Jones hardly legitimates the sacrifice through allusion to past conflicts which may have become entangled with modes of heroic discourse; rather he expresses a sympathetic continuity with all suffering of soldiers throughout history. Jones, therefore, does not validate war, but rather through allusion is able to 'magnify its horror and intensify the grief it causes'.[45] The stature of *In Parenthesis* has grown with time and the endorsement of its achievement and acceptance of the book into the war canon is now certified. In fact, from being overlaid with allusion, the sheer detail and physicality of the poem, its accuracy and honest portrayal of

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[40] Paul Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory: The Illustrated Edition* (New York: Sterling, 2009), p. 178, p. 181.
[41] Fussell, p. 181.
[42] Fussell, p. 188, p. 190.
[43] Fussell, p. 190.
[44] Dilworth, *Shape of the Meaning*, p. 95.
[45] Dilworth, *Shape of the Meaning*, p. 106.

soldiering has been lauded and praised by literary critics, but even more satisfyingly by historians of the war.[46]

Secondly, perhaps Jones's idiosyncrasies and eccentricity are exacerbated by his firm allegiance to Catholic faith, the influence of which may have alienated and confounded critics and seemingly limited a grasp of Jones's poetry to an initiated minority sympathetic and familiar with Liturgical practices, Thomist theology and ecclesiastical dogmatics of the Roman Catholic Church. Arguably this has been a fundamental stumbling block in his reception. Despite a Catholic revival which witnessed many intellectuals and prominent artistic and literary figures making public conversions to Catholicism,[47] Jones's steadfast adherence to a traditional orthodoxy has served to distance readers, especially in an increasingly secularised British mid-twentieth century society.[48] The place of the Catholic in British society has remained a fraught one. Long after Catholic emancipation in the middle to late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries Catholic identity in Britain has been characterised by an on-going sense of tension, prejudice and misunderstanding. This has become an ingrained trait amongst Catholics in Britain who share a 'sense of alienation from the majority culture' which is generally manifested in a fascination with the Middle Ages, a cultural and spiritual orientation towards continental Europe, and a 'mistrust of the idea of British national identity' particularly due to its being 'associated with post-Reformation Protestant nation-building'.[49]

The residual misgivings towards religious poetry in general, and British Catholic poetry in particular which has been viewed as peculiarly alien, have had a lasting effect on

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[46] See Anna Johnson, 'Truth-telling versus literary allusion in David Jones's *In Parenthesis* (1937)', *World War One Centenary: Continuations and Beginnings* (University of Oxford/JISC, 2012) http://ww1centenary.oucs.ox.ac.uk/memoryofwar/truth-telling-versus-literary-allusion-in-david-jones's-in-parenthesis-1937-2/ [accessed 6th September 2017]

[47] See Richard Griffiths, *The Pen and the Cross: Catholicism and English Literature, 1850-2000* (London: Continuum, 2010); Ian Ker, *The Catholic Revival in English Literature, 1845-1961: Newman, Hopkins, Belloc, Chesterton, Greene, Waugh* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 2003); and, Joseph Pearce, *Literary Converts: Spiritual Inspiration in an Age of Unbelief* (London: Harper Collins, 1999).

[48] The place of religion in modern society and its relationship to literature is obviously a vastly complex and contentious one which will be addressed later in the thesis. Suffice to say, this thesis aims to show that neither the view of a complete secularization of cultural space, nor a conservative cordoning off of religious identity and ritual which becomes sublimated into poetic practice and spirituality are tenable, viable or wholly satisfactory frameworks in the complex interrelated dynamic which occurs in the exchanges between religion and literature in modern culture.

[49] Martin Potter, *British and Catholic?: National and Religious Identity in the Work of David Jones, Evelyn Waugh and Muriel Spark* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2013), p. 2, p. 3.

the reception and criticism, especially of David Jones.[50] Paul Stanbridge comments that this 'Roman Catholic strain' in his poetry has hampered his acceptance into a wider readership, claiming that, 'Jones critics are rarely anything but Catholic or High Anglican, and atheists are rarely readers of Jones'.[51] To a certain extent Stanbridge is correct in this judgement, although one wonders whether a more studious analysis of the claim would find empirical or logical evidence for its defence as to why this *should* be so, or even if it has any bearing on the quality and type of readings that are possible. Nevertheless, he does illustrate a certain attitude towards Jones in which the poet is treated with kid gloves. Stanbridge quotes Drew Milne's introduction to Jones's poems in an anthology, *Conductors of Chaos* published in 1996. Awkward, embarrassed and defensively apologetic of Jones's religious faith, Milne tries to redress this with praise for Jones's cultural critique:

> [...] the toxic qualities of Jones's modernist Catholicism should not be seen as unfortunate lapses into dogmatics, but rather a perspective which enables an antisocial critique which needs to be read against its overtly affirmative claims.[52]

Such arguments and prejudice should of course be resisted and recent scholarship on the relationship between modernism and Christianity have seen in David Jones a fascinating and illuminating figure. The triumphant and complacent secularisation thesis which relied on an emptying out of religious belief in modernity's advance has increasingly come under scrutiny. Critics have shown that religion was not vanquished; nor did it die, only to haunt culture and return as repressed or sublimated aesthetic spirituality. Rather it remained an open and lively part of modernist cultural debates, and became part of a proliferating investigation into human rituals and religious practices in a variety of academic disciplines such as anthropology, sociology and psychology.

Certainly, in characterising the connections between modernism, modernity and religion, one does not want to elide the often bitter and antagonistic conflict which was

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[50] See Jean Ward, 'Christian Poetry: Problems of Definition and Reception', in *Christian Poetry in the Post-Christian Day: Geoffrey Hill, R. S. Thomas, Elizabeth Jennings* (Frankfurt am Main; New York: Peter Lang, 2009), pp. 11-43.
[51] Paul Stanbridge, 'The Making of David Jones's *Anathemata*' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of East Anglia, 2011), p. 15.
[52] Drew Milne, qtd. in Paul Stanbridge, 'The Making of David Jones's *Anathemata*', p. 15.

present in the cultural and social upheavals of the early twentieth century. As scholars such as Finn Fordham and Erik Tonning have shown, the origins of theological modernism are embroiled in the tumultuous contestations over historical biblical criticism, the immutability and sanctity of dogma and the challenge of scientific and positivist discoveries which were initially fought within the Catholic Church.[53] Encapsulated in Pope Pius X's encyclical *Pascendi Domini Gregis* in 1907, and later in 1910 in the vehement Oath Against Modernism, this hostile campaign within the Church, however, was not only an internal matter of insular dogmatic dispute but part of a much wider cultural upheaval. Furthermore, despite the battle lines being harshly drawn between Modernists and Anti-Modernists, the actual historical situation which developed (especially in the post-war period) points to a series of negotiations, debates and intermediary figures working between and within official Church discourse, as well as a myriad of artists, writers and intellectuals of the avant-garde who contributed creatively to the conversation and collaboration between a *renouveau catholique* and modernists.[54] Paradoxically, the encyclical and oath which represented a watershed moment in its attempt to contain and supress Modernism as the "synthesis of all heresies"[55] in fact emboldened, shaped and lent a sense of cohesiveness and solidarity to the welter of cultural modernisms which were only a loosely connected motley of nascent, disparate and emergent responses to modernity itself.

Broadly, however, by examining what Erik Tonning has called 'formative tensions between Modernism and Christianity'[56] and its defining paradoxes there is a sense that polemical narratives of Enlightened and progressive secularisation and/or the spectral haunting return of religion may be adjusted to emphasise an historical and cultural

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[53] Finn Fordham, 'Between Theological and Cultural Modernism: The Vatican's Oath Against Modernism, September 1910', *Literature & History*, 22.1 (Spring 2013), 8-24.

[54] The atmosphere is explored and captured in Stephen Schloesser's work *Jazz Age Catholicism* in which he argues that:

> After the Great War, Catholicism came to be imagined by certain cultural and intellectual elites not only as being thoroughly compatible with 'modernity', but even more emphatically, as constituting the truest expression of 'modernity'.

Stephen Schloesser, *Jazz Age Catholicism: Mystic Modernism in Postwar Paris, 1919-1933* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press), p. 5. See also Jamie Callison, 'Jesuits and Modernism? Catholic Responses to Anti-Modernism and Versions of Late Modernism', *Literature & Theology*, 31.1 (March 2017), 1-18.

[55] Darrell Jodock, 'Introduction: The Modernist Crisis', in *Catholicism Contending with Modernity: Roman Catholic Modernism and Anti-Modernism in Historical Context* (Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 1.

[56] Erik Tonning, *Modernism and Christianity* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), p. 5.

imbrication of continuities and discontinuities between religion and modernism that refuses to portray the relationship in terms of stark binaries. It is here that we must be wary of the complexity of the term 'Modernism' which in itself is a knotty designation and to which there can be attached very little critical consensus as to its identity, character, periodization, political outlook and even aesthetic goals. If anything, 'modernism' has become a highly charged term in a highly voluble and fractious academic discourse which itself is characterised by a confusing variety and multiplicity of interests and approaches. Recent scholarship, however, has opened up 'modernism', and the term has been transformed from a monolithic 'Modernism' with its canonised writers into a welter of 'modernisms' which each carry different inflections indicating more nuanced readings. David Jones with his own multidisciplinary interests and sources of inspiration is located at the centre of these cultural shifts and his writing marks a fascinating response to these concerns.

Finally, and more unsettling for critics is the accusation levelled at David Jones concerning his political ideology and his associations and flirtation with right-wing ideas circulating in the 1930s. This specific charge of proto-Fascism is part of a wider critique of David Jones's ideological and political beliefs which underlies his thought and poetry and tie it to a specific Catholic intellectual milieu of interwar Britain. The most cited example of this critique is put forward by Elizabeth Ward in her book *David Jones: Myth-Maker* (1983) in which she argues that Jones,

> remains profoundly implicated in the political extremism represented by the Chelsea group as a whole, not only by virtue of his public association with its leading members, but in that the philosophical and historical assumptions on which their rejection of contemporary Western democracy was based were identical to those which underlay his aesthetic theories and helped to determine the form and direction taken by his art.[57]

Perhaps the alleged charge of Fascist sympathies may be more easily dismissed or at least put into context of the 1930s during which some intellectuals and artists, blinkered by their natural political conservatism and more afraid of Stalinist Communism, found themselves

[57] Elizabeth Ward, *David Jones: Mythmaker* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1983), p. 55.

taking a sympathetic view towards Hitler and his Nazi party. Dilworth has carefully analysed and put into context the letter upon which much of the Fascist leanings and sympathy towards Hitler and his *Mein Kampf* seem to be based. During the course of the Second World War, and certainly afterwards, faced with the revelations of the Nazi genocide, Jones was to admit he had got it gravely wrong and renounced his terrible misplaced sympathy with Nazism.[58]

When Jones did engage political concerns – he was mostly reticent and apolitical in part due to his sceptical nature, reclusive personality, and ultimately his devotion to art[59] – Jones's political views are somewhat naïve, convoluted and ambivalent: on the one hand, his appropriation of a national myth of defeat associated with the Celtic capitulation, the overrunning of the Gauls by the Roman Empire, and the heroic defeat of the Welsh thirteenth century king Llywelyn Fawr can legitimately be read in a wider anti-imperialistic mode which Jones consistently maintains throughout his writing. Dilworth argues that from the beginning David Jones's poetry was 'anti-imperialist […] thoroughly and explicitly anti-totalitarian'.[60] On the other hand, as Ward advisedly warns, though Jones's 'immediate concerns were apolitical' the very 'ideas with which he was experimenting' were 'capable of a more ambiguous extrapolation into the political sphere than he seems' to have realised.[61] In this view, uncritical and idealistic ideas about 'Welshness' and the sanctity of land or the 'break' problematically segues into an anti-democratic and convoluted romanticisation of racial and mythological cultures and peoples. William Wootten has argued that this

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[58] See Thomas Dilworth, 'David Jones and Fascism', in *David Jones: Man and Poet*, ed. by John Matthias (Orono, Me.: National Poetry Foundation, University of Maine, 1989), pp. 143-159; and, Dilworth, *David Jones*, pp. 200-204.

[59] In attempt to exonerate Jones, Dilworth reveals that Jones only voted twice in his life and not out of any passionate compulsion but to avoid parade duty in 1918 and reluctantly and half-heartedly in 1945. Dilworth, *David Jones*, p. 200.

[60] Dilworth, 'David Jones and Fascism', p. 144. Wootten will have none of this concession arguing that Jones's anti-imperialism which romanticised the 'vanquished Welsh, his anti-war sentiments and such sympathy as he had for Nazism all share a similar perspective' in effect implied a 'moral equivalence between the British Empire and the fascists'. William Wootten, 'The Aesthetics of History in the Modern English Long Poem: David Jones's *The Anathemata*, basil Bunting's *Briggflatts*, Geoffrey Hill's *Mercian Hymns* and Roy Fisher's *A Furnace*' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Durham, 1998), pp. 78. However, defending the British Empire, capable of brutality and genocide, against Nazism is no watertight argument. Quantifiable and comparative debates over moral equivalence are contentious and can be unedifying too. It is important to remember that Jones was consistent in his denunciation of imperialism and totalitarian violence. He abhorred the 'hate thing' in *Mein Kampf* and knew that 'the conception of the world in terms of race-struggle […] will hardly do'. David Jones, *Dai Greatcoat*, p. 93. These statements go some way to show in word, not in the least deed, that Jones was neither anti-Semitic nor a fascist.

[61] Ward, p. 24.

sensibility seems to be the catalyst for his 'flirtation with Nazism' in the first place.[62] Wootten is less accepting of Jones's supposed naivety and ignorance when it comes to political matters arguing that 'the spectacle of a romantic playing *realpolitik* is not edyifying'.[63] He notes C. H. Sisson's corroborating comments which criticise Jones's 'dubious race romanticism' which led to Jones's 'continual brooding over the defeat-tradition of the Celts (curiously akin to the suicide-streak in romantic German nationalism) [and which is] altogether unwholesome'.[64]

Whilst Dilworth again rebuts these criticisms in his article 'David Jones and Fascism', the serious ideological concerns demand more thorough treatment beyond the scope of this thesis.[65] Needless to say that analysis of Jones's poetry shows very little in Ward's claims that it was deeply influenced by fascism. If anything, it is the opposite. He maintains a consistent rejection of violence and the totalitarian ideologies that destroy minority cultures and groups. In addition, perhaps the judicious response is to question whether rejecting the same thing (liberal democracy and economic materialism) necessarily equates to fascism or makes Jones equivalent to those who may share this rejection. Jones never shared the violent anti-Semitism and brutal means which National Socialism pursued. Furthermore, '[s]ymapthy for and interest in fascism does not make one a fascist, but it often […] demonstrates the extent of the revolt against liberal democracy of which fascism was merely one manifestation'.[66]

I would argue that both these areas of debate, the value of *In Parenthesis* which is suggestive of the role of tradition and the nature of epic poetry amidst a violent technological modernity which dehumanises and threatens sources of meaning and the thorny issue of David Jones's political ideology (and indeed his theology) are most

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[62] William Wootten, 'The Aesthetics of History in the Modern English Long Poem: David Jones's *The Anathemata*, basil Bunting's *Briggflatts*, Geoffrey Hill's *Mercian Hymns* and Roy Fisher's *A Furnace*' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Durham, 1998), pp. 71-83.
[63] Wootten, p. 77.
[64] C. H. Sisson, qtd. in Wootten, p. 81.
[65] See Tom Villis, *British Catholics and Fascism: Religious Identity and Political Extremism Between the Wars* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).
[66] Tom Villis, *British Catholics and Fascism*, p. 176. Agreeing with Harman Grisewood, Villis concludes that Jones's ambivalent attitude towards Hitler is similar to his contradictory view of the Roman Empire. He saw Rome as 'the giver of culture and the destroyer of local community' and therefore Hitler was '*both* a rebuke to the decadence of the Western world and a horrific dictator who unleashed a disastrous war'. Villis, *British Catholics*, p. 179. Even making such a distinction is very difficult and fraught with problems. Contemporary events point to the ongoing legacy of this.

propitiously analysed in terms of a wider critique of the key problematics of Modernist writing.[67] It is at the interstices of an evolving and dynamic conception of what constitutes Modernist writing in its reactionary and complex forms and artistic practice that we may most viably construct a reading of Jones that is at once sympathetic, which does not dismiss his Catholicism and sometimes unfavourable political views, and is also a critical re-evaluation of his contribution to twentieth century world literature.

By re-focusing the question of Jones's legacy in these terms we are able to take into account the wider situational crisis of modernity Jones addressed in his work. This extends the study of his work beyond the aesthetics of form and footnotes and scholarly debates about movements into the cultural and ideological arena of modernity and religion.[68] Jones was well aware of the 'difficulty' of his poem, and he attributed it directly to his cultural situation. In one respect, and if we were to accept David Jones's and even T. S. Eliot's thoughts on the matter, the poet, writing in a mode that Jones and Eliot did, was becoming increasingly redundant in the mid-twentieth century. As outlined above, for historical and socio-cultural reasons, the 'civilisational situation' which David Jones found himself in makes such a poetic project almost unfeasible and impossible.[69] T. S. Eliot, who championed David Jones's cause and saw to it that his work was published through Faber and Faber, defended *The Anathemata* against claims of obscurity and impenetrability. In 1955 in a programme on David Jones which was broadcast on BBC Wales Radio, Eliot commented that,

> My own belief is that we, including David Jones, have all been desperately anxious to communicate, and maddened by the difficulty of finding a common language. […] In the preface to *The Anathémata* David Jones shows himself aware of this problem. 'There have been culture-phases', he says, in which the maker and the society in

[67] This project has been initiated by several Jones scholars most notably Kathleen Henderson Staudt in *At the Turn of Civilization: David Jones and Modern Poetics* (1994).

[68] In her summary of this phenomenon of Jones's mixed reception Kathleen Staudt suggests that in fact this is the direction Jones would have liked interest in his work to have taken. He remonstrates to Harman Grisewood that reviewers are too preoccupied with influence and that the most pressing literary critical question is the examination of the 'problem facing *all* artists in *such and such a phase or set-up*, trying to discover how different artists solved, or did not attempt to solve, the problems represented'. Jones, *Dai Greatcoat*, p. 174. Plainly put, this is the problem of modernity. Staudt shows that this problem 'haunts the poetry and poetics of the twentieth century, especially the work of Anglo-American poets writing during and between the two world wars'. Staudt, p. 8.

[69] Steven Matthews, 'Provincialism and the Modern Diaspora: T. S. Eliot and David Jones', *English*, 58.220 (2009), 57-72.

> which he lived shared an enclosed and common background, where the terms of reference were common to all. It would be an affectation to pretend that such was our situation to-day.[70]

Whether such a common background, terms of reference or language can be so safely assumed will inform one of the central critiques of this thesis. Such a view presupposes ideological conceptions of cultural value which have increasingly come under scrutiny. For the moment, it is sufficient to note that in defending Jones against criticisms of impenetrability, Eliot not only dissolves the multiplicity of the languages and references of the text itself, but nostalgically relies on an imagined culture of shared comprehension and mutual understanding which must have existed sometime in the past. The ideal horizon of expectations of readership seems to cohere neatly within a specific cultural framework, and more is the misfortune that this framework has been eroded by modernity. The fact that such a community of readers no longer exists is presented as the most significant obstacle to Jones's reception. Hence, Jones's project will focus on a recovery, re-appropriation and re-integration of a threatened cultural identity and body of knowledge seen to be threatened, if not nearly lost, in the modern context.

## The 'Break' and the Bridge[71] and the 'Priest in the Catacombs': Crisis of Modernity and Sacramental Poetics

What is generally meant by the crisis of modernity? Notwithstanding its maddening complexity, a rough sketch of the modern condition is possible. We may take this as a rough version: modernity empowers and engenders, it also endangers and disempowers. By sheer force of reason and technological invention modernity impels a march of progress towards Enlightenment modernising backward and traditional cultures as it develops, rationalises and improves society's economic, political and social structures. However, as the dialectic would have it, Enlightenment breeds the monsters of alienation and enslavement: the very

[70] T. S. Eliot, qtd. in Steven Matthews, 'Provincialism and the Modern Diaspora', p. 57.
[71] I would like to acknowledge the publication of the following article which makes very similar connections subsequent to my initial writing of this chapter. Jasmine Hunter-Evans, 'Bridging the Breaks: David Jones and the Continuity of Culture', in *David Jones: Culture & Artifice: A Collection of Essays, Flash Point Magazine*, 18 (Summer 2016) http://www.flashpointmag.com/hunterevans.pdf [accessed 8th September 2017].

freedom and rational agency of individuals becomes confounded and compounded within mechanisms of power and domination.

Modernity demands the new. It violently and unashamedly casts off the darkness of ancient superstition, religion, myth and traditional sources of meaning.

What then was David Jones's diagnosis and critique of the crisis of modernity? And how did he seek to resolve the problems in his creative work?[72] Jones's critique of modernity, which is part of his wider theory of culture emerged in the early 1920s and was developed throughout the next decades in a deeply thought and sincerely felt exploration of an eclectic range of texts and sources.[73] Most influential in his intellectual and artistic formation was his tutelage under Eric Gill, his readings of Catholic Scholastic philosophy, especially Jacques Maritain, his association with the Chelsea Group, his own wide and thoughtful exploration of British and Continental European history, and reading of varied thinkers and writers.[74]

Having suffered the brutality of the First World War, influenced by the pessimism of cultural decline propounded by Oswald Spengler and increasingly uncomfortable in an urbanised and then blitzed London, Jones found himself cut off from the sources of history and tradition which he thought formed the basis of a sacred Britain. Jones saw himself struggling in a cultural phase characterised by a split between *epistêmê* and *technê* and in a world in which culture, with its myriad myths, traditions and histories crumbles into a purely technical utilitarian civilization. Jones describes it in the preface to *The Anathemata*:

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[72] Like Crane, and later Walcott, these poets were acutely aware of the problems of their time and place and equally aware of the limitations of posing any artistic 'solution' to the wide and deep problems of modernity. Jones notes that, 'it is the business of a poet, in the sixth, or eighteenth, or any century, to express the dilemma, not to comment upon it, or pretend a solution'. Jones, 'Art in Relation to War', *Dying Gaul*, p. 130. None of these writers adhere absolutely to this. At various points, they all offer resistance and a vision of a better community and relationship with the world through their art.

[73] For an explication of the development of Jones's ideas as part of a biographical framework tracing the influence on his thought by his experiences and associations with Eric Gill and the Ditchling community, the Chelsea Group see Elizabeth Ward, pp. 1-69 and Adam Schwartz, 'Finding Harbor with a Remnant: David Jones's Religious Voyage', *Third Spring*, pp. 290-374.

[74] The best succinct but comprehensive introduction to the intellectual, artistic, cultural and historical backgrounds to David Jones is still Jonathan Miles, *Backgrounds to David Jones: A Study in Sources and Drafts* (Cardiff, University of Wales Press, 1990).

> In the late nineteen-twenties and early 'thirties among my most immediate friends there used to be discussed something that we christened 'The Break'.[75] We did not discover the phenomenon so described; it had been evident in various ways to various people for perhaps a century; it is now, I suppose, apparent to most. Or at least most now see that in the nineteenth century, Western Man moved across a rubicon which, if as unseen as the 38th Parallel, seems to have been as definitive as the Styx.[76]

That Jones mixes a contemporary reference to the post-War division of Korea in conjunction with the ancient Roman crossing of the Rubicon attests to his complex analogical reading of a multi-layered history which consistently questions the imperial divisions and conflict of any era. Crossing the rubicon as the fateful march of empire building is figured along with drawing of boundary lines between world super powers.[77] The break with its widespread ramifications is a defining and world changing phenomenon.

Theorists of modernity would no doubt demand specificity as to the time of 'the break' and the exact causes. Jones was never that precise. He did not speculate about the 'radical incompatibility between the world of the "myths" and the "formulae"' and he would not hazard an exact historical aetiology nor, 'whether it is a matter only of historical accident, of fortunate and fortuitous association of ideas leading to estrangement and misunderstanding'.[78] Rather, he claimed to be, 'concerned only with the actual existence of a lesion of some sort (whether ephemeral or more enduring we do not know), which

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[75] The exact origin or source of the term is not clear. Colin Wilcockson speculates that it may be from William Morris's ideas on the effect of industrialisation as a break in tradition and thread of the past to the present in a lecture, 'The Beauty of Life'. Colin Wilcockson, 'David Jones and "The Break"', *Agenda*, 15.2-3 (1977), 126-31. Thomas Dilworth asserts in his biography that the term 'translates Nietzsche's *Aufbruch*' and notes that Jones also termed it 'the gap'. Thomas Dilworth, *David Jones*, p. 124-125.

[76] Jones, *The Anathemata*, p. 15-16.

[77] For Derek Walcott, such a break, and by implication one of the fissures of modernity, is also figured in terms of the cartographic demarcation of space. His defining line is the meridian across which one travels from the old world to the new.

> Across the meridian, I try seeing the other side
> […]
> Once the world's green gourd was split like a calabash
> by Pope Alexander's decree.

Derek Walcott, *Omeros*, p. 191.

[78] Jones, *The Anathemata*, p. 17.

appears, in part at least to be in some way bound up with the historical phenomena indicated'.[79]

However, integral to his belief in the human as artist, Jones regarded the idea of a break or rupture in traditional forms of life in at least two ways: as a historical phenomenon and as part of a specific (catholic and sacramental) understanding of human nature and human communication with an implied set of activities, values and choices present throughout time. Indeed, as we shall see it is in Jones's estimation that it is the latter that is essential in redeeming our humanity and healing the wounds of history's ruptures and fighting the dehumanising forces of modernity. Man's nature which shares attributes of both beast and angel is as a unique sign-making creature, and most particularly 'extra-utile' signs. This activity provides in a small measure of optimism the continuity with ages past. It also provides the route towards worship of the divine.

First, as a socio-historical phenomenon, the break refers to the increasing power and reach of technology and mechanisation, transforming social structures, economic modes of production, and most keenly felt by Jones, altering cultural forms and ways of knowing and being – the artist is the worst affected by the break. The modernisation 'break' may have begun at an indeterminate point between Renaissance and Enlightenment, but for Jones, the extent and ramifications of such development, beginning to be felt in the nineteenth century, were unprecedented by the mid-twentieth century's 'bewildering developments of a technocracy' in which 'no metamorphosis since pre-historic times is in any way comparable to the metamorphosis that we are now undergoing'.[80] However, influenced by Spengler, and because in some ways Jones's saw history partially as a cycle, no one singular break was identifiable.[81] In Spengler's organicist and seasonal trope of history's development, cultures born in spring flourish in a harmonious flowering of artistic, cultural

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[79] Jones, *The Anathemata*, p. 18.

[80] David Jones, 'Art and Sacrament', *Epoch and Artist: Selected Writings by David Jones*, ed. by Harman Grisewood (London: Faber and Faber, 2008), pp. 143-179, p. 173, (p. 144-145).

[81] Spengler's influence on Jones is important, but the extent to which he critiqued and rejected Spengler is also noticeable in his privileging the role of the artist to work as a 'fifth columnist' in a megapolitan technocracy and refusing to submit to the late civilizational values of fact and utility and producing work in the contemporary age of value and quality. Jones also provides a richer and more complex Catholic theology of history which fundamentally challenges Spengler's historical pessimism. See Kathleen Henderson Staudt, '*The Decline of the West* and the Optimism of the Saints: David Jones's Reading of Oswald Spengler', in *David Jones: Man and Poet*, ed. by John Matthias, (Orono, Me.: National Poetry Foundation, University of Maine, 1989), pp. 443- 463; and Jonathan Miles, *Backgrounds*, pp. 36-64.

and social activity, growing through the phases of summer, until they mature into civilisations, which in their senescence of the bleak winter, decline into decadence, imperial power struggles, and eventually collapse. In its cyclical form, the idea of history also allows Jones to conceptualise a comparative framework where phases can be mapped analogously onto one another. Unlike the 'juxtaposition of contemporaneous events [which] can be used to efface history' this sense of history is a 'juxtaposition [which] elucidates the societies that are brought together'.[82] Hence, the decadence of Rome is linked to the twentieth century's decline.[83] Rubicon, Styx and the 38th Parallel are brought together. In socio-historical terms this means that there is no one specific and determinant break. There are many breaks. And, although not repeated in identical fashion, they are analogous to one another. The break cleaves us from history, but we cleave to historical analogies in articulating the seeming repetition of history's events. Summarising the history of the term, René Hague suspects that it was first used by Hilaire Belloc, 'who applied it in a religious and political context to the move from the theocentric world of the Middle Ages to the man-centred world of "modern history" and particularly the breach with Rome and the snapping of continuity with Roman tradition at the Reformation'. He argues that Gill extended the term to include the effects of capitalism and industrialisation, while 'David complicated the issue when he moved the term into the field of aesthetics and the fine arts'.[84]

Importantly, this conception of the break segues into a system of values which underlies Jones's entire theory of culture and aesthetics. This conception, rather than simply a linear or even cyclical temporal model, reconfigures the idea of a break as a purely historical term. The break is now suggestive of an internalised tension or duality within any culture or even an individual at any given time. This duality can be encapsulated by the distinction between the gratuitous (extra-utile) and the utile. The gratuitous points to that communication of signs and creation of artefacts for the intransitive value of in-and-of-themselves and not for any specific value or utility in an means-ends calculation. Entering

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[82] Miles, *Backgrounds*, p. 59.

[83] A particular passage in Jones's copy of *Decline of the West* was heavily marked and underscored:

> Considered in the spirit of analogy […] the World-War, corresponds with the transition from the Hellenistic to the Roman age. Rome, with its rigorous realism – uninspired, barbaric, disciplined, practical, Protestant, Prussian – will always give us, working as we must by analogies, the key to understanding our own future. The *break of destiny that we express by hyphening the words 'Greeks-Romans' is occurring for us also, separating that which is already fulfilled from that which is to come*.

Spengler, qtd. in Miles, *Backgrounds*, p. 59-60.

[84] René Hague in David Jones, *Dai Greatcoat*, p. 192.

the realm of values and virtues concerning human activities, Jones writes that 'man is a creature which, from its earliest known beginnings, has consistently shown a duality of behaviour' between on the one hand, like all other creatures, 'astonishing ingenuities directed towards quite obvious and practical ends', and on the other, 'unlike other creatures' occupied with activities which have no 'obvious end'.[85] Man's dual nature is to be 'not only the supreme utilist, but the only extra-utilist, or sacramentalist'.[86]

This second sense of the 'break', as defining an ontological way of being and values latent in human culture and society, is given precedence at various stages in their trajectory.[87] Developed from Spengler's framework the split is between culture as rooted, organic and unified communities with integrated religious, political and cultural values and an urban megalopolitan civilisation, characterised by centralised and abstract bureaucratic political rule on principles of abstraction, rational control and order underwritten solely by the material principle of utility. As activities which individuals may or may not accentuate and nurture in any culture, this dichotomy is part of Jones's sacramental poetics. For Jones, certain periods or cultures were more able to find the balance or synthesis of these ever-present and competing tendencies. Jones introduces another metaphor to describe the condition: marriage and divorce.[88] Jones thought that in ancient Greece and the Middle Ages a perfect union or harmony between the practical, utile and the extra-utile had been

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[85] David Jones, 'Use and Sign', *The Dying Gaul and Other Writings* (London: Faber and Faber, 2008), pp. 177-185 (p. 177-178).

[86] David Jones, 'Use and Sign', p. 178.

[87] Jones is not totally consistent in this regard. In his poetry especially, he will portray a Roman predilection for the utile and include it in the symptoms of their civilizational decline. And yet he still maintains that the modern age is particularly extreme and unprecedented in its adoption of the utile and rejection of the gratuitous:

> In the wide diversity of human artefacture a not inconsiderable gulf separates the carburettor from the chalice. It is a separation about which our ancestors, whether of a few hundred or a few thousand years ago, knew nothing whatever. For them the horse-cloth and the cloths of an altar were all of a piece. They had no inkling of the sharp and growing division between the strictly 'utile' and the strictly 'significant'. But we are men of today: beneficiaries of a now world-wide technological civilization which is in process of revolutionizing our mode of living and of making and of thinking in every conceivable context.

David Jones, 'A Christmas Message 1960', *The Dying Gaul and Other Writings* (London: Faber and Faber, 2008), pp. 167-176 (p. 174).

[88] Jones extends the same analogy and reasoning in 'Art and Sacrament'. He writes, 'this divorce with which we are here concerned is a dichotomy to be observed in the actual civilization of which we are a part' and as such it is a 'situational problem'. These 'frictions, estrangements and contradictions within man owing to the wedding within himself of the "utile" and the sacramental' are manifest in the 'fruit of this wedding' which is 'to a less or greater degree, observable throughout the whole gamut of man's making', but now seem to be truly separated, and 'nullified'. Jones, 'Art and Sacrament', p. 176-177.

achieved. In *The Anathemata* he describes the periods respectively using Spengler's seasonal cycles to structure temporal pinnacles of cultural achievement. He celebrates the Greek synthesis of incarnate bodily and spiritual form worshipped in objects of art and sculpture:

> Six centuries
> and the second Spring
> and a new wonder under heaven:
> man-limb stirs
> in the god stones
> and the kouroi
> are gay and stepping it
> but stanced solemn.[89]

Also the combination of utility, engineering and architectural skill with the gratuity of sculptured forms on the cathedrals of Europe is looked at with expectant but hopeful realism and more awe than nostalgia:

> Not again, not now again
> till on west-portals
> in Gallia Lugdunensis
> when the Faustian lent is come
> and West-wood springs new
> (and Christ the thrust of it!)
> and loud sings West-cuckoo
> (Polymnia, how shrill!)
> will you see her like
> if then.[90]

[89] Jones, *The Anathemata*, p. 91.
[90] Jones, *The Anathemata*, p. 92.

It may have been only a 'marriage of convenience' but it was a 'mutual intermingling of the utile and inutile that produced 'astonishing and very varied fruitfulness' which the 'progeny of that union has caused later generations to wonder with a great admiration'.[91]

Jones's idea of a break is not necessarily informed by the Romantic reaction against materialism, and as such it tempers the desire for nostalgic return or revival. As Potter argues, Jones based the critique of the break with its 'deleterious effects of utilitarian culture on the possibilities for artistic communication' on 'Aristotelian and medieval philosophy'.[92] Jones may have seen in Medieval culture the epitome of an integrated and unified culture most congenial to the artist and a culture of what he termed gratuity, but this did not necessitate a false hope of recreating such a culture. He refused to bemoan his fate too heavily, and certainly not to give in to a Spenglerian pessimism.[93] He accepted his time. He knew that the artist 'cannot by taking thought change himself into an artist of some other culture'.[94] It results in a form of bad faith, an artistic denial and dishonesty. Whilst he retreated somewhat into a dug-out position in a 'hide-out or bunker[95] he held out for the reward of continued isolated struggle of fringe artists and collaborative groups:

> We are born into civilization at this date. Certainly no one can afford to be superior, for we all, in one way or another, are involved, and all seek differing compensatory means as each is best able. But in the absence of a corporate tradition there can be no corporate renewal. Individuals of this or that perception or vision, or even the

[91] David Jones, 'Use and Sign', p. 179.
[92] Martin Potter, 'Nature in Modernity: Can it Signify – David Jones and Natural Objects as Signs', *University of Bucharest Review*, XIV.1, (2012), pp. 84-89 (p. 84).
[93] One wonders if Spengler was more disabling than enabling for modern poets. Hart Crane, who also read Spengler, pits the potential of his art to attain epic voice against Spengler's pessimism. He writes at a low moment of writing *The Bridge*:

> My statements may appear in a less insane light after you have read what has principally spurred them – the Spengler thesis. This man is certainly fallible in plenty of ways but much of his evidence is convincing – and is there any good evidence forthcoming from the world in general that the artist isn't completely out of a job?

Crane, *O My Land, My Friends*, p. 258.
[94] David Jones, 'Religion and the Muses', *Epoch and Artist: Selected Writings by David Jones*, ed. by Harman Grisewood (London: Faber and Faber, 2008), pp. 97-106 (p. 97).
[95] Jones, 'Art in Relation to War', p. 160. Jones would often use the language of military to describe the cultural war of attrition against all odds. See Jones, 'Past and Present', *Epoch and Artist*, p. 141

> collaboration or individuals, may locally and in a tentative and fluid manner make the desert blossom.[96]

Jones still sought the means for configuring resistance and a counter-force to the prevailing dispensation.[97] In addition, Jones clarifies that although this change is irreversible the modern condition is an ambivalent one.[98] The modern dilemma is to be caught betwixt and between times, entranced and propelled towards the future and the new, but haunted and persistently nagged with the sense of the losses of the past. We have not crossed 'the memory-effacing Lethe' and despite the fact that 'man has found much to his liking, advantage, and considerable wonderment' he still 'retain[s] ineradicable longings for […] the farther shore'.[99] Jones knew that '[s]ocially […] nothing could be done' about such changes, nevertheless he maintained the hope that 'in his art and writing, he might provide a bridge over the gap, an ark for the flood'.[100]

Jones's concept of the break demanded cognisance of both the losses and the gains made from history's course. Accounting these losses and gains was not a simple procedure of balancing the wager books of history's events. Jones's view of history, even when augmented and modified by a theology of history, remained realistic, neither pessimistic nor

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[96] Jones, 'Religion and the Muses', *Epoch and Artist*, p. 105. Jones is engaging in a skirmish with Spengler who dismissed the contemporary arts as dead forms not of any value and diminished the role of the artist in late civilizational decline. Jones is keen to assert the role of the artist through history, and especially in the times of most deprivation. See Kathleen Henderson Staudt, '*The Decline of the West*', p. 452-453.

[97] This became part of the Catholic movement's self-fashioning as they sought to adopt innovation and experimental aesthetic ideas and wrest these from left-wing politics whilst still challenging liberal democracy. Ironically, the break did provide a blueprint for resistance for like-minded Catholic intellectuals. The close associates Jones speaks of founded a journal *Order* in the 1920s. Jones provided the cover illustration. Note the following in the introduction of an issue:

> If Modern Times are broken from the past I believe that even now we are breaking from Modern Times. It is by no coincidence that the Avant-garde in France and Germany is a Catholic business, that the newest thing is finding itself to be the oldest.

Cited in Villis, *British Catholics and Fascism*, p. 118.

[98] To reference Charles Taylor again: the historical progression of modernity and especially the process of secularization seems to involve a series of 'ratchet effects' or developments that apparently do not allow for a return to the pre-modern age. Charles Taylor, 'Comparison, History, Truth', in *Myth and Philosophy*, ed. by Frank Reynolds and David Tracy (Albany: State of New York Press, 1990), p. 52. Taylor develops the implication of this further in his lectures at the Berkley Center for Religion, Peace & World Affairs. Charles Taylor, 'Master Narratives of Modernity, Disenchantment and Secularity, and a More Adequate Narrative of Western Secularity', The Berkeley Centre Lectures, October 2008, < https://berkleycenter.georgetown.edu/events/master-narratives-of-modernity-disenchantment-and-secularity-and-a-more-adequate-narrative-of-western-secularity> [accessed 8th September 2017].

[99] Jones, *The Anathemata*, p. 16.

[100] Thomas Dilworth, *David Jones*, p. 125.

optimistic in the face of violent upheaval and conflictual change. Like Walcott,[101] Jones maintained a deep sympathy for the losses and devastation wrought upon peoples and cultures, and he refused to justify these losses in terms of a larger argument of rational progress, necessary development towards some greater good, and the colonial civilising myth. The argument that 'any loss shall not be glossed over, but faced' is put powerfully in 'Art in Relation to War'.[102] Jones argues against an apologist's sanguine view of empire or a belief in progress which would rationalise or account for losses in terms of greater goods accrued by later epochs. Jones argues that this is simply to 'refuse to call death by its terrible name' and 'disguise[s] the reality of loss' in terms of a 'legend of general progress'.[103] Rather Jones, with strong anti-imperial condemnation, states that,

> When […] any civilized imperium is extended over a savage culture, it is the worst sort of delusion to suppose that a real death has not been inflicted and all the subsequent 'goods' accruing to the 'civilizing of the people of that culture do not alter by one iota the reality of the thing done and no future development, development 'in time', can compensate.[104]

He concludes,

> World history is more of a rake's progress than the conservation of 'good'. It is a criminal dissipation of noble things.[105]

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[101] In a slightly similar, but as we shall see more radical attitude to the uses of history, Walcott will face his colonial history and rather than enter into recriminations, rage, revenge, or despair he calls for a 'truly tough aesthetic of the New World [which] neither explains nor forgives history'. Derek Walcott, 'The Muse of History', *What the Twilight Says: Essays* (London: Faber and Faber, 1998), pp. 36-64 (p. 37).

[102] Jones, 'Art in Relation to War', *The Dying Gaul and Other Writings* (London: Faber and Faber, 2008), pp. 123-166 (p. 153).

[103] Jones, 'Art in Relation to War', p. 153.

[104] Jones, 'Art in Relation to War', p. 154.

[105] Jones, 'Art in Relation to War', p. 154. There is more to the argument. Jones is also arguing that without a '"divine order", a supernatural economy, by which such words as "compensation", "fulfilment", "sublime-ation" can have meaning' then we can make no sense of justice. This is the case for both atheist and religious alike. If anyone with a sense of optimism is to 'open all the cupboards and bring out all the skeletons and consider the frustration which history past and present offers as a "pattern", are compelled […] to presume the necessity of other-world values'. Jones, 'Art in Relation to War', p. 154, p. 155.

Jones expresses this anti-imperial sentiment by poetically transposing St. Augustine's dictum: ''Tis a great robbery | – is empire'.[106] These losses range from the fact of awful genocides and destruction of cultures with their certainties of inherited traditions and heritage of shared backgrounds to the basic human experiences of delight, beauty and affection. Whilst Jones acknowledges the advance of a scientific culture brings great benefits, he is wary of the hidden and unseen effects of a machine age which he equates directly with the horrors of mechanised warfare. The preface to *In Parenthesis* sums up the dramatic alteration in human understanding, perception and experience. It describes the brutal disruption from a world in which it is possible to dream of heroic and epic martial values in which 'the intimate, continuing, domestic life of small contingents of men, within whose structure Roland could find [and] enjoy, his Oliver' to the 'relentless, mechanical […] wholesale slaughter' of the war.[107] It is worth quoting at length:

> It is not easy in considering a trench-mortar barrage to give praise for the action proper to chemicals – full though it may be of beauty. We feel a rubicon has been passed between striking with a hand weapon as men used to do and loosing poison from the sky as we do ourselves. We doubt the decency of our own inventions, and are certainly in terror of their possibilities. That our culture has accelerated every line of advance into the territory of physical science is well appreciated – but not so well understood are the unforeseen, subsidiary effects of this achievement. We stroke cats, pluck flowers, tie ribands, assist at the manual acts of religion, make some kind of love, write poems, paint pictures, are generally at one with that creaturely world inherited from our remote beginnings. Our perception of many things is heightened and clarified. Yet we must do gas-drill, be attuned to many new-fangled technicalities, respond to increasingly exacting mechanical devices; some fascinating and compelling, others sinister in the extreme; all requiring a new and strange direction of the mind, a new sensitivity certainly, but at a considerable cost.[108]

[106] Jones, *The Anathemata*, p. 88.
[107] Jones, *In Parenthesis*, p. xv.
[108] Jones, In Parenthesis, p. xiv.

Staudt notes that Jones shares this common situation of the break and its ambivalent results with other modernists including Eliot, Pound and Joyce, but it is 'reformulated with striking originality and urgency in the writing of David Jones'.[109] All suffered from a sense of alienation and dislocation caused by the rapid changes of modernity. This anxiety and unease is marked by a strange uncanny sensibility of double temporality. In one respect moderns are 'acutely conscious of the contemporary' where the relationship of past to the present is fractured and disconnected. The modern is 'cut off from the life of the past' and 'traditional consciousness'.[110] And yet despite this, the modern retains what Stephen Spender describes as an awareness of 'belonging not just to our own particular moment in time but also to the past' so that we live with a 'past consciousness living in the present'.[111] Jones's use of the idea of 'parenthesis' suggests this paradox of discontinuity and continuity. Even in the most traumatic breach of war marked by its unassimilable violence and immediacy so different to anything experienced before, Jones records that 'at no time did one so much live with a consciousness of the past, the very remote, and the more immediate and trivial past, both superficially and more subtly'.[112]

But it is precisely this sensibility, the connection with the past, that Jones sees in most jeopardy in the break, and in the rise of technocratic 'utile' modernity. The effects of the break were of most serious concern to Jones as artist, sign-maker. Since his materials were the traditions and things of the past, the break also posed a threat to the historian and sacramentalist. He argued forcibly that regardless of the losses and gains in other spheres 'during the present phase of world history there are symptoms of real loss to man as artist'.[113] In 'A Christmas Message 1960' he wrote:

> In spite of our astonishing technological advance and the evident benefits (leaving aside the horrors) which have accrued from this intense application of human intelligence and exploratory genius, a deprivation of some sort must be noted.[114]

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[109] Staudt, *Turn of a Civilization*, p. 9.
[110] Stephen Spender, qtd. in Staudt, *Turn of a Civilization*, p. 8.
[111] Stephen Spender, qtd. in Staudt, *Turn of a Civilization*, p. 8.
[112] David Jones, *In Parenthesis*, p. xi.
[113] Jones, 'Art in Relation to War', p. 152-153.
[114] David Jones, 'A Christmas Message 1960', p. 169.

This deprivation can be summarised in terms of three interrelated effects: alienation and dehumanisation, the separation and fragmentation of human activity into professional, specialised but increasingly distinct and isolated practices which are presided over by the technical and scientific materialist spheres, and the erosion of sources of historical, cultural significance. Underlying all these deleterious effects is the most basic and most problematic problem of man as sign maker.

Jones's critiques of mass machine ages technocracy and manufacture is in some ways similar to a Marxist one. In all likelihood, this was drawn from the influence of Morris, via Gill's Ditchling craft movement. René Hague recalls the group's influences and ideas:

> We lacked an infusion of existentialism, even of Marxism, in that sense of both which sees man as the maker of his own being […] Eric [Gill] never used the word alienation, although it expresses the idea that was so often in his mind. David speaks at least once of '*man's alienation from his poiesis*'. This is not a suggestion that David is a Marxist where Eric is not: but simply that Eric insisted on 'technical alienation', David on 'poetic'.[115]

That said, for Jones, this alienation was technical *and* artistic; they are inseparably interlinked. Writing *The Anathemata* and his essay 'Art in Relation to War' in the middle of the war, he concluded that 'war accelerates those deprivations'.[116] Concentration on the utile in technical production, in labour and indeed any socio-economic activity, at the expense of the extra-utile results in the estrangement of man's fundamental creaturely nature, which, as it is a sacramental nature, affects his artistic and spiritual being. War, once a state of exception, now a form of total organisation results in its 'technical and utilitarian demands' becoming 'more all embracing' so that they 'affect far larger numbers and classes of the population' and 'are more difficult to evade, are more exacting'.[117]

The consequences of this alienation are profound as they lead to a serious dehumanisation in the sense that it imperils man's fundamental basic nature: as sign-maker and creator of the extra-utile material sign. Jones attacks the 'age of technics' for its

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[115] René Hague, *David Jones* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press for Welsh Arts Council, 1975), p. 29.
[116] Jones, 'Art in Relation to War', p. 133.
[117] Jones, 'Art in Relation to War', p. 133.

reduction of sacramental man as artist to the fact men of the utile and because it replaces true art's desire for sacred delight of intrinsic form with the,

> tendency [..] for creativeness to become dehumanised, for contrivance to usurp imagination, for the will towards shape to become almost indistinguishable from a mere will to power.[118]

Jones, informed by a belief in Incarnation which viewed sacramental sign-making as the mediation between our bodies and the spiritual realm, saw this 'phase of our civilisation' tending 'to disembody man and at the same time compel him to sub-human (because entirely material, utile and functional) activities'.[119] There is something fiercely Blakean in Jones's expression of the darkness of the age in biblical and apocalyptic language in *The Anathemata*. Power, money and commodification have enslaved man as he is entranced by, and reduced to, the very mass-produced pastiche-ersatz products of his age:

> in came the Principate
> and the beginnings of the end and the waxing of the megalo-
> polis and the acute coarsening of the forms, the conscious
> revivals, the ecletic grandeur
> . . . the grand years
> since we began our
> Good Time Coming.
> Already, on every commodity and on the souls of men,
> The branded numerals: *sexcenti sexaginta sex*.[120]

Second, Jones bemoans the schism which is manifest in psychological and cultural terms between the pragmatic utile and the gratuitous *ars*. The break or rift divides the spheres of human activity (whether sacred, practical and/or artisanal) that were once connected. Jones

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[118] Jones, 'Religion and the Muses', p. 104, fn. 2.
[119] David Jones, 'Wales and Visual Form', *The Dying Gaul and Other Writings* (London: Faber and Faber, 2008), pp. 63-93 (p. 90).
[120] Jones, *The Anathemata*, p. 90.

complains that a 'severe dislocation or cleavage vitiates all' modern man's 'efforts and tends to a most unnatural departmentalizing of his thought and necessarily of his work'.[121] In a similar vein to the contentious dichotomous 'two cultures' theory purported by C. P. Snow in his 1959 Rede Lecture, *The Two Cultures and the Scientific Revolution*, David Jones argues that the 'vast extension and unprecedented acceleration of the technologies' leaves the artist in an invidious dilemma.[122] The artist finds the 'symbolic life' (by which he means a unified culture institutionalised by religion with a sense of historical tradition) 'progressively eliminated' and the 'technician is master'.[123] This is most destructive for the human spiritual condition leaving the modern age alienated and divided:

> In a manner of speaking the priest and the artist are already in the catacombs, but separate catacombs – for the technician divides to rule. No integrated, widespread, religious art, properly so-called, can be looked for outside enormous changes in the character and orientation and nature of our civilization, and this is beyond our horizon – however much such vistas may occupy speculative thoughts.[124]

By entombing the priest and artist in the catacombs, David Jones characterises a deathly, restrictive interment in a secular age which alienates two cultures which have historically thrived as integrated and mutually interdependent spheres of human practice. Jones bemoans what Charles Taylor describes as a loss of and destabilisation of fundamental and meaningful frameworks. To capture Weber's notion of modernity's disenchantment or 'the dissipation of our sense of the cosmos as a meaningful order', Taylor notes, via Nietzsche, that this has 'allegedly destroyed the horizons in which people previously lived their spiritual lives'.[125] In a post-Christian age, in which our horizons have been circumscribed by an instrumental rationality, not only are the sources for spiritual life ossified, but also is our relationship with the past. Modernity's preoccupation with the 'now' and the 'new' sacrifices a sense of the ancestral past for a single-minded advancing vision of future posterity, prosperity and progress.

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[121] David Jones, 'Wales and Visual Form', 90.
[122] Jones, 'Notes on the 1930s', p. 49.
[123] Jones, 'Religion and the Muses', p. 103.
[124] Jones, 'Religion and the Muses', p. 103.
[125] Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, p. 17.

Amongst the effects outlined above, one strand particularly troubled Jones: this was the loss of a shared common history and cultural connection with tradition largely to the degeneration of culture into a civilizational utilitarian technocracy. Jones consistently critiques:

> The technocracy in which we live [which] is concerned with the purely utile, with what functions. […] [T]he technological, scientific advances which, one way or another and whether beneficent or otherwise, were destructive of immemorial ways of life, of rooted cultures of all sorts and of erosions too numerable to mention.[126]

In his preface to *The Anathemata*, Jones is acutely aware of, and sensitive to his belatedness, the incongruity, anachronistic mode of his writing which has been rendered obscure and obsolete, and worst of all, seemingly invalid. This would be the real reason for his use of footnotes: to provide the sources for his *materia poetica* which he believed was being lost on the modern reader.[127]

On one level, this makes David Jones's poetic task difficult as a society loses its intuitive associative connection with the repository of images, symbols, stories from an inherited culture and tradition. Jones uses the example of the word 'wood' which he takes to have an immensely rich and deep signifying history and etymology, with of course religious meaning as 'Wood of the Cross'.[128] But any name with a local history and topography depends on the 'mythus, deposits, *matière*, ethos, whole *res* of which the poet is himself a product'.[129] It is the connection with an underlying myth and religious source of signifying power that is most precious and precarious in a dispensation that reduces signifying power to singular exchange of meaning for purely functional use. For Jones, the 'arts abhor any loppings off of meanings or emptyings out, any lessening of the totality of

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[126] David Jones, 'Notes on the 1930s', p. 44, p. 46.
[127] As Blamires notes, 'Jones's notes are an educational technique' through which he 'is trying to make it possible for his contemporaries to get something of the vitality that he himself feels in the symbols, images, and references that the modern world has largely discarded' so that ultimately Jones is 'attempting to break down the isolation of the twentieth century and to reestablish the continuities of human experience'. Blamires, *David Jones*, p. 134-135. Similarly, Staudt compares, but also differentiates, Jones's project to Pound's notion of the *paideuma* or his quasi-pedagogical and ideological programme of elite education and initiation into the "tangle or complex of the inrooted ideas of any period"'. Staudt, pp. 10-11.
[128] Jones, *The Anathemata*, p. 23.
[129] Jones, *The Anathemata*, p. 22.

connotation, any loss of recession and thickness through'.[130] A concomitant reduction in the richness and variety of possible associations and meanings narrows the potential and possibilities for the artist.

On another level, beyond 'this impoverishment' concerning the 'validity and availability of the poet's images', there is another more serious degradation at work here.[131] This speaks to the deepest of his fears, and for Jones, legitimates his aesthetic theory of sign as sacrament: the prevailing '"situational problem"'[132] undermines and destroys the properly sacred nature of signs and signification. The poet's task then is to reinstate the gratuitous, non-utilitarian nature of signs which point beyond to an 'otherness'. Contrary and unfashionable to some twentieth century theories of language, Jones holds the relationship between sign and signifier as inviolate and part of an holistic sacramental and incarnational communication. The poet as priest finds that his 'immediate, day by day, factual problem' as well as his task is 'to lift up valid signs'.[133] The meaning and resonance of the title referring to 'anathemata' is illuminated in Jones's description of the bardic poet's task which is to celebrate:

> the blessed things that have taken on what is cursed and the profane things that somehow are redeemed: the delights and also the 'ornaments', both in the primary sense of gear and paraphernalia and in the sense of what simply adorns; the donated and votive things, the things dedicated after whatever fashion, the things in some sense made separate, being 'laid up from other things'; things, or some aspect of them, that partake of the extra-utile and of the gratuitous; things that are the sign of something other, together with those signs that not only have the nature of a sign, but are themselves, under some mode, what they signify.[134]

Given this situation problem, Jones responds with his own poetic epic task in which he constructs a vision of the artist as an amalgamated figure of poet, hunter of forms, cult-figure and priest, builder of bridges, and gatherer in of fragments. He writes that the artist

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[130] Jones, *The Anathemata*, p. 24.
[131] Jones, *The Anathemata*, p. 23.
[132] Jones, *The Anathemata*, p. 22.
[133] Jones, *The Anathemata*, p. 23.
[134] Jones, *The Anathemata*, p. 29.

'in our present megapolitan technocracy […] must still remain a "rememberer"'.[135] Charged with the ancient office of a shaman, bard or priest like figure, the artist must hark back to earlier 'culture-phases' of society retrieving deeply embedded archeological *materia* and cultural deposits to assume a role where the poet was:

> explicitly and by profession the custodian, rememberer, embodier and voice of the mythus, etc., of some contained group of families, or of a tribe, nation, people, cult.[136]

In the statement Jones goes on to describe himself as a poetic incarnation of Boethius: 'nicknamed "the Bridge"' the artist-as-Boethius caught in a disjointed historical phase similarly 'carried forward into an altogether metamorphosed world certain of the fading oracles which had sustained antiquity'.[137] Although, Jones laments the loss of the gods in a disenchanted, mechanistic 'intense technological phase' he nonetheless develops a poetics of place which revives the myth, legend and histories to portray the depth and semantic richness of place.[138] As a cultural gatekeeper and artisan, Jones sees himself working towards the 'maintenance of some sort of single plank in some sort of bridge'.[139] The image of the bridge is significant. In the opening section of *The Anathemata* David Jones describes the priest-artist figure in the following way:

> The cult-man stands alone in Pellam's land: more precariously than he knows he guards the *signa*: the pontifex among his house-treasures, (the twin-*urbes* his house is) he can fetch things new and old: the tokens, the matrices, the institutes, the ancilia, the fertile ashes – the palladic foreshadowings: the things come down from heaven together with the kept memorials, the things lifted up and the venerated trinkets.[140]

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[135] Jones, *Dying Gaul*, p. 17.
[136] Jones, *The Anathemata*, pp. 15-16.
[137] Jones, *Dying Gaul*, p. 17.
[138] Jones, *Dying Gaul*, p. 17.
[139] Jones, *Dying Gaul*, p. 17.
[140] Jones, *The Anathemata*, p. 50.

The figure of the artist is portrayed standing heroically yet perilously resolute amidst the wasteland which is at once a realm of Arthurian myth and also the present contemporary civilizational landscape. As a guard he protects the *signa* or sacred signs and symbols. As a hunter of forms or *venator formarum* his duty is to capture the vestiges and remnants of the ancient world.[141] In the catacombs of culture and history, nevertheless, the artist as priest creates and makes venerated forms from the ashes which are fertile and hold the seeds of future growth and life. Finally, as a pontifex, with the echo of its etymological roots in the Latin words *pons*, meaning bridge, and *-fex* from *facere* to make, his role endorsed with Catholic dogma and authority is to construct and build from materials both old and new, divinely sourced from heaven and or retrieved lowly relics, a poetic structure of signifying form.

The sacramentalisation of the bridge as an artistic concept becomes a means of 'carrying forward of the making of works that are '"significant"' and which can be 'justified *only* as signs of something other, are evocative, incantive and have the power of "recalling", of "bringing to mind"'.[142] Perhaps due to its 'utile' associations which reduce it to mere function[143] many critics fail to notice that the bridge combines both elements of aesthetics and utility; it mediates a spatial and temporal continuity and is a means towards a transcendent purpose for the arts.

Nevertheless, for Jones it is also an ambivalent image signifying the break and separation and the means to re-connect. The necessity for a bridge reflects Jones's deepest fears and anxieties of the abyss of meaning opened up in an alienating modern age. But as an antidote to this condition, since man has not crossed 'the memory-effacing Lethe' and still 'retain[s] ineradicable longings for […] the farther shore', he still has the natural capacity of man as artist, creator and sign-maker. [144] The bridge in a more religious and metaphysical sense, then, is a vital connection from the material to the spiritual. For Jones it resonates with the religious and spiritual process of sacramental signification whereby out of nothing a shape is created which 'shows forth' in the Thomistic notion of beauty as *splendor*

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[141] Jones, *The Anathemata*, pp. 19-20.
[142] Jones, 'Notes on the 1930s', *Dying Gaul*, p. 47.
[143] For a connection with Hart Crane, and the religious as well as commercial symbolic value of the bridge in culture as opposed to the cathedral, see David P. Billington and Robert Mark, 'The Cathedral and the Bridge: Structure and Symbol', *Technology and Culture*, 25.1 (Jan 1984), pp. 37-52. The parallels with Crane's attempt to sanctify the bridge are pertinent.
[144] Jones, *The Anathemata*, p. 16.

*formae*.[145] In his seminal essay 'Art and Sacrament' Jones writes that signs and signification in their fullest sense:

> partake in some sense, however difficult to posit, of that juxtaposing by which what was *inanis et vacua* became radiant with form and abhorrent of vacua by the action of the Artifex, the Logos, who is known to our tradition as the Pontifex who formed a bridge 'from nothing' and who then, like Brân in the *Mabinogion*, himself became the bridge by the Incarnation and Passion and subsequent Apotheoses.[146]

It is in this statement that we get to the heart of David Jones's aesthetic and religious vision where we witness several aspects of integrative poetic sensibility at play. Jones synthesizes elements of the Catholic doctrine of creation with the Incarnation; he reveals an adherence to analogy and typology informed by a Christology and eschatological relationship between signs; he grounds his aesthetic theory in Neo-Thomism, in which he was well schooled thanks to Eric Gill and the influence of Jacques Maritain; and, he expresses the intimate connection between the personal (his military experience is embedded in the allusion to Bendigeidfran's grand gesture when he 'bridged the Irish Sea with his own body for his army to march upon'[147]) and a remembering of his cultural heritage as an Anglo-Welsh poet obsessed with Ancient British, Celtic and Welsh myth and history. All these myriad elements work ultimately to one end: to secure the inextricable relationship between art and the religious, all of which are embedded in a theology of history and a critique of modernity. And Jones legitimates this using the accepted etymological root of the word 'religious' in *religio*, which with *obligatio*, shares its meaning with the word 'ligament' and is suggestive of a binding and a securing.[148]

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[145] Rowan Williams places this Thomistic aesthetic concept at the centre of Jacques Maritain's ideas on beauty. It is the characteristic of *splendour formae* to give delight in an '"overflow" of presence', a quality which points not only to the 'metaphysical depth and truth of beauty', but also the 'overplus of significance' which suggests the gratuity of art. Rowan Williams, *Grace and Necessity* (London: Continuum, 2005), p. 13. In all Jones's work the epic impulse can be understood theologically and aesthetically as an attempt to 'gather in' and show the depth and range of signification in metaphysical and cultural and etymological terms.

[146] David Jones, 'Art and Sacrament (1955)', *Epoch and Artist: Selected Writings by David Jones*, ed. by Harman Grisewood (London: Faber and Faber), pp. 143-179 (p. 160).

[147] Jones, 'Art and Sacrament', *Epoch and Artist*, p. 160, n. 1.

[148] Jones, 'Art and Sacrament', *Epoch and Artist*, p. 158.

Arguably these disparate, multiple and sometimes contradictory impulses do not cohere and, as I have noted, Jones's work has been criticized for being abstruse, overly laden with obscure references, and, without a modulating lyric voice and at least seemingly an underlying structure, alienating, jagged and jarring. His poetic oeuvre is characterised by a difficult, complex, multi-layered, and densely allusive form which exhibits the tension between wholeness and fragmentation. Aware of this danger in his own work, Jones's describes his epic poem, *The Anathemata*, as 'fragments of an attempted writing'.[149] Indeed, to legitimate his project through allusions to British historiography and modernist poetics, Jones invokes the ninth century Welsh historian Nennius whilst echoing T. S. Eliot's famous lines in 'The Wasteland':

> 'I have made a heap of all that I could find.'[150]

From the broken and scattered images and residues of a decaying Western civilization which he pessimistically and acerbically claimed was 'down the drain', Jones casts his poetic vocation as responding to the trauma of ruin and loss in the same manner that motivated Nennius when he spoke of an '"inward wound" which was caused by the fear that certain things dear to him "should be like smoke dissipated"'.[151] The poet's calling is to connect and shape continuities despite the fragmentation of modernity. This demands an integrative, synthesizing and unifying impulse towards cultural re-generation, restoration and preservation. Jones writes that in his task of a '"rememberer"' the poet's business is 'to keep open the lines of communication' by handing on such fragmented bits of our own inheritance" so that the artist is 'not responsible *for* the future, but he is, in a certain sense, responsible *to* the future'.[152]

To return to the image of the catacomb of modernity, whilst, the catacomb becomes a space of burial and death, Jones is aware of the historical and archaeological associations resonant and implicit in the use of the word. The word connects to Jones's multiple references in his poetry to tumps, barrows and a host of other sites around the British Isles

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[149] Jones, *The Anathemata*, p. 14.
[150] Jones, *The Anathemata*, p. 9.
[151] David Jones, 'On the Difficulties of One Writer of Welsh Affinity Whose Language is English', *Dying Gaul*, pp. 30-34 (p. 33); Jones, *The Anathemata*, p. 9.
[152] David Jones, 'Past and Present (1953)', *Epoch and Artist*, pp. 138-142 (p. 141).

which hold the secrets of the dead. Beneath this word, Jones will also activate the sense of the tomb as womb, and, again throughout the corpus of his work he invokes the power of a mysterious feminine presence. Whether we interpret this in the Catholic terms of Marionology or even psychoanalytic terms as Kristeva's semiotic archaic *chora*, Jones consecrates the womb/tomb as a vital place of regeneration opposed to a 'megapolitan' city. Furthermore, it directly recalls the famous Roman Catacombs, the Christian built subterranean and labyrinthine network of tunnels and passages used for burial chambers, religious practices and even refuge. The catacomb is a sacred site and place of pilgrimage storing the martyrs, saints and the community of the dead amongst the *anathemata* of the past, inscriptions and tokens (Jones was an accomplished engraver). In eschatological and typological terms (a mode favoured by Jones's analogical poetics) the catacomb recalls the place of rest where Christ's body was lain, and by implication, it will be evacuated upon Resurrection.

Within the catacombs David Jones resolves that his artistic and religious work is interrelated, synthetic and archaeological. In his idealisation of a corporate culture and community beyond the disintegrating forces of abstraction and specialisation, Jones conceives of his project as a dialectic between a process of insular mining and excavating as well as amalgamation through reconnecting and reuniting. Whilst writing about the successes of modern painting Jones could just as well be describing his own poetic method:

> There is *liaison* between the practitioners, but they rather tunnel in a network of inter-related saps, than move in imposing formation. The work is essentially one of infiltration – it is intensive, and usually seeks to resolve a limited problem; on the other hand it is eclectic, and draws upon (because it is aware of) many past deposits, from the most barbarous to the most sophisticated.[153]

## Questions of Form and Aesthetics of History

Jones's use of form in many ways defies simple explanation and classification. He paid painstaking attention to matters of detail and form, not only in the composition of *The*

[153] David Jones, 'Religion and the Muses', p. 99.

*Anathemata* and his art works, but throughout the references to form in his essays. For Jones, form was an integral part of beauty and the showing forth of delight that a work of art exhibits. In a theological sense, making form replicated and was analogous to God's creative power. But more pressingly he argues that in the utile world 'men [were] never more needed to contemplate form' which is there to reveal to them 'the end of man's happiness'.[154] Through the formal appreciation that '"parts are united in one"' Jones thought we would find the 'most convincing analogy […] in this world of the "proportioned parts of the heavenly city" to delight in which, religion says, is part of our redeemed destiny'.[155] In Jones's Catholic aesthetics the artwork aims to be an incarnational form conveying the radiant and transcendent delight or the '*splendor formae* – the "splendor of the secrets of being radiating into intelligence"'.[156]

The guiding idea throughout this exploration of form will be Neil Corcoran's comments that '*The Anathemata* is, crucially, a poem about its own possibility'.[157] One of its possibilities is the enclosure of the diversity and cultural material of Britain into a form which creates a space for the appreciation and connection with the past: a poetic epic text 'to include history' and 'sing the tale(s) of the tribe(s)'. But more than this, in a self-reflexive manner, the poem calls attention to its form, its mode of narration, and suggests the material nature of signs and their production all the whilst confronting the very crisis of meaning and fragmentation inherent in the modern 'situational problem'. In this way form is wedded to content, the utile meanings intrinsically married to the extra-utile embellishments, digressions, associative play and depth. Writing about the qualities of Welsh poetry, Jones praises 'how in this poetry the form and the content, the sound and the meaning, are inextricably one'.[158]

In most of the discussions of *The Anathemata*, critics have employed various models of form in order to make sense of the complex, seemingly fragmentary and difficult nature of the poem. David Jones was both helpful and somewhat frustratingly unhelpful in guiding

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[154] Jones, 'Art in Relation to War', p. 135.
[155] Jones, 'Art in Relation to War', p. 135.
[156] Jacques Maritain, *Art and Scholasticism*, p. 27.
[157] Corcoran, p. 19.
[158] David Jones, 'Welsh Poetry', *Epoch and Artist: Selected Writings by David Jones*, ed. by Harman Grisewood (London: Faber and Faber, 2008), pp. 56-65 (p. 57).

the reader to understand the nature of the poem from a formal perspective. He describes the work as,

> more a series of fragments, fragmented bits, chance scraps really, of records of things, vestiges of sorts and kinds of *disciplinae*, that have come my way by this channel or that influence. Pieces of stuffs that happen to mean something to me and which I see as making perhaps as a kind of coat of many colours, such as belonged to 'that dreamer' in Hebrew myth. Things to which I would give a related form, just as one does in painting a picture.[159]

Several clues are useful here as to how to read the form. First, as I argue below, there is the collection of material artefacts, the *anathemata* of personal and cultural significance. Second, in an image which I return to in the discussion of Walcott's quilting metaphor, the text is a woven object, a textile crafted from the narrative threads of Britain's heritage to form a new material form. Last, as critics such as Dilworth have taken up in their explications of form, as is natural for an artist, Jones directly relates his attempt to find form in words to the visual medium in which he would find spatial relationships between objects and representations.[160] Jones describes the poetic form of *In Parenthesis* as:

> a shape in words, using as data the complex of sights, things exterior and interior, the landscape and paraphernalia of that singular time and of those particular men.[161]

All these are useful indicators, and for a poet who was devoted to the incarnational, the emphasis on spatiality, materiality, and the singularity of the body and location is as important as the abstract essence of form, and the universal pattern or type. But what they seem to lack, and what critics especially influenced by certain schools of criticism seek, is a guiding principle or structuring aspect of form to secure a unifying coherence between form and content.

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[159] Jones, *The Anathemata*, p. 34.
[160] In an interview with Saunders Lewis, Jones admits that he found this aspect most challenging and difficult, having been trained as an artist in the visual medium and now trying to work with words. Jones's dense and layered paintings do provide a fascinating comparison to the dynamics of his literary work.
[161] Jones, *In Parenthesis*, p. x.

In what is the most elaborate excuse for daydreaming in the Mass, Jones based one explanation for the form on a subjective and psychological account of personal recollection and thought. By entitling the entire poem as 'fragments of an attempted writing' Jones would want us to accept that the fragments are about, or organised 'around and about, matters of all sorts which, by a kind of quasi-free association, are apt to stir in my mind at any time and as often as not "in the time of the Mass"'.[162] Whether one can reconcile this artistic stream-of-consciousness with the theory of impersonality Jones adhered to – he wrote that the 'workman must be dead to himself while engaged upon the work, otherwise we have that sort of "self-expression" which is undesirable in the painter or writer as in the carpenter, the cantor, the half-back, or the cook'[163] – perhaps depends on the willingness to accept genius or extend the boundaries of personal consciousness to a collective 'mind of Europe'. Jeremy Hooker accepts the latter, and argues that this idea of free association by comparing the voice of *The Anathemata* to a 'consciousness encompassing the world of the poem, as we think of Tiresias's in relation to *The Waste Land*'.[164]

There is a case to be made for a psychoanalytic reading of the form of the structure as a dream poem. Its shape and contents might be analysed in terms of repressions, blockages, or as a series of traumatic screen memories, or the analysis of the symbolic associations with manifest and latent content. Jones did undergo years of psychoanalysis with Bill Stevenson and the writing was considered a form of therapy during his severe nervous breakdown in the early 1930s. Interestingly, perhaps drawing on the Bergsonian idea of duration and certainly influenced by modernist experiments in subjective time and form,[165] Jones shows how time and thoughts are erratic, travel at the speed of light, and reveal patterns and shapes. *The Anathemata* is an attempt then to map the movement and direction of thought which has such speed and agility in its 'ability to twist and double on its tracks, penetrate recesses and generally nose about'.[166] He writes about the shape and trajectory of the thoughts as well as their construction in terms of a spatial metaphor of a fairly chaotic journey by train through London:

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[162] Jones, *The Anathemata*, p. 31.
[163] Jones, *The Anathemata*, p. 12.
[164] Jeremy Hooker, *Poetry of Place: Essays and Reviews 1970-1981* (Manchester: Carcanet, 1982), p. 38.
[165] Jones's love for Joyce immediately 'springs to mind'. He was in awe of and learnt by rote and read aloud the Anna Livia Plurabelle section of *Finnegans Wake*. Dilworth, *David Jones*, p. 124.
[166] Jones, *The Anathemata*, p. 32.

> the mental associations, liaisons, meanderings to and fro, 'ambivalences', asides, sprawl of the pattern, if pattern there is – these thought-trains (or, some might reasonably say, trains of distraction and inadvertence) have been as often as not initially set in motion, shunted or buffered into near sidings or off to far destinations, by some action or word, something seen or heard during the liturgy.[167]

Writing the poem is not as pleasantly idle as daydreaming. Jones compares the construction of the poem, which is replicated in the many arduous journeys and digressive narratives in the content of the poem, to a meandering and wandering which rather like an actual journey, is frustrating and full of 'botherations, not to speak of more serious mishaps'.[168] Jones compares the 'same tediums' of writing as with the making of a journey:

> strugglings with awkward shapes that won't fit into the bag, the same mislayings, as of tickets, the missings of connections, the long waits, the misdirections, the packing of this that you don't need and the forgetting of that which you do.[169]

And yet, Jones asks us to accept on some level that what he has written 'has no plan, or at least is not planned'.[170] This is of course playfully disingenuous and is belied by the lengthy writing and re-writing, composition and structuring that the production of the poem entailed.[171] Jones, concedes on two points, and again introduces helpful, and also unhelpful, analogies. First, he claims if 'it has a shape it is chiefly that it returns to its beginning'; and, second, if it has a 'unity it is that what goes before conditions what comes after and *vice versa*'.[172] The poem to be sure returns to its beginning, 'the time of the mass', but this hardly does justice to the complexity of the movements in space and time represented in

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[167] Jones, *The Anathemata*, pp. 31-32.
[168] Jones, *The Anathemata*, p. 33.
[169] Jones, *The Anathemata*, p. 33. Perhaps we should remember that Jones was often itinerant, without fixed abode, but also later in life, agoraphobic.
[170] Jones, *The Anathemata*, p. 33.
[171] This truly 'labyrinth' aspect of the process is beyond the scope of the thesis, and resolve of the author, but it has been ably pursued by Tom Goldpaugh and Paul Stanbridge in their explorations of the draft materials in a comprehensive genetic approach to *The Anathemata*. See Tom Goldpaugh, 'Mapping the Labyrinth: The "Ur-Anathemata" of David Jones', *Renascence*, 51.5 (Summer 1999), pp. 252-280.
[172] Jones, *The Anathemata*, p. 33.

the poem as well as its intricate and allusive quality. Jones's comments on the unity of the poem are also elusive and even enigmatic. He tries to elaborate comparing it to a 'conversation' that if dropped in on is difficult to make sense of, but which needs to be experienced as throughout: 'you won't make sense of one bit unless you read the lot'.[173] While Jones wants the poem to be read aloud and the poem has the sonorous quality of voices spoken, liturgical chants and so on, Jones also seems to be hinting albeit obliquely at a complex hermeneutic or circular mode of interpretation. This way of reading the poem depends on a chiasmatic and circular reading process. The unity of the poem is found through an accumulation of ideas through time which in turn influence those that have come before to determine the whole. We read and discover the meaning in the apparent meandering process of the textual journey forwards in time, using a type of inductive reasoning to ascertain associations and find significance; in retrospect, we also read backwards with knowledge of what has passed, which in turn shapes and reshapes the material of the past.

One useful possible similarity to explain this dynamic is Eliot's notion of the formation of tradition in which past and present interact in a symbiotic way: the past whose 'existing monuments form an ideal order among themselves, which is modified by the introduction of the new'.[174] More apposite, however, is Jones's particular theological analogical and typological mode of interpretation in which significant events are connected through the figuration of prophecy and fulfilment and make sense of the whole narrative. If we consider a quotation from Jones's favourite theologian, Maurice de la Taille that the simple domestic rituals of the Last Supper constituted an eternal significance where Jesus 'placed Himself in the order of signs', we can take 'order' to mean both the linear and determined fulfilment of events including the Crucifixion and Resurrection, and more extensively the fulfilment of Old Testament pre-figurations which now make sense and are fulfilled. More generally though, the typological approach which reads forwards and backwards establishes a continuity between past, present and future. By placing events in a scrambled, fragmentary but accumulating order, Jones allows 'mythic and historical events to interpret one another' in a 'typological vision' which 'implies the continuing presence of

[173] Jones, *The Anathemata*, p. 33.
[174] T. S. Eliot, 'Tradition and the Individual Talent', *Selected Prose of T. S. Eliot*, ed. by Frank Kermode (London: Faber and Faber, 1975), p. 38.

order and intelligibility that enable poets to continue their work in any era, past, present, or future'.[175]

What emerges from Jones's preliminary remarks and the implications briefly touched on is that the nature of the form of *The Anathemata* may be read in terms of the symbols and themes, such as the voyage and the mass. Importantly in such readings we abstract a thematic element and argue from this back into the text reading the content into the form. This is a valid approach, but it does mean that there is competition as to the relative significance of the theme or symbol chosen. Genre provides a possibility for the reading and classification of form, and I address this in my discussion of *The Anathemata* as an archaeological epic. However, again this mode has proved contentious, not in the least because of the idiosyncratic and unclassifiable nature of the text, but also because of the unsuitability of the term 'long poem' which I discussed in my introduction.[176]

Another way of viewing the debates about form in *The Anathemata* is either through a closed or open model. Closed, or what David Soud terms centrist readings, begin from the poems 'circularity' and then try to locate a core nodal point or centre of the text around which the rest of the poem is organised and oriented.[177] Dilworth's is the most complex and intricately argued model, combining the theological implications of Jones's belief in the Mass as the central act in Christian dogma and history with the symbolic and structural qualities of Jones's visual method perfected in his earlier illustrations of *The Deluge*.[178] As with the other critics who find a key figure or shape to base their reading on, Dilworth chooses the circle and the cross. He describes the form as a

> pattern [which] consists of a number of closing circles, each involving a return to a beginning. The outer circles contain the inner ones in ordered succession and create

[175] Staudt, *Turn of a Civilization*, p. 28.
[176] Vincent Sherry argues against Rosenthal and Gall that Jones is able to modulate the lyric and achieve the unity required for the poem to succeed as a long poem. Vincent Sherry, 'Current Critical Models of the Long Poem and David Jones's *The Anathemata*', *ELH*, 52.1 (Spring 1985), pp. 239-255. As I argue in the introduction, the critical model of the epic, with its accommodations and revisions, is an adequate lens to guide a reading of the form of the three epics.
[177] David Soud, *Divine Cartographies: God, History, and Poiesis in W.B. Yeats, David Jones, and T.S. Eliot* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), p. 127.
[178] Dilworth, *Reading David Jones* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2008), pp. 178-181.

> a structure resembling the circles of a target, which diminishes in radius with proximity to the centre.[179]

The centrality and the ever-present ubiquity of the Mass is exemplified by the fact that the poem begins and is framed by the outer circle of the Consecration in present time, and it moves inwards to the centre of the poem in which Elen, The Lady of the Pool celebrates the Eucharist, as the 'innermost circle' which is in fact the Cross.[180] This explains the complex dynamic between the linear journeys through time from pre-history to the mid nineteenth century and frames them in the present moment of the Mass. This invokes the metaphysical machinery of the eschatological and the efficacy of the anamnesis of the Sacrifice and the transubstantiation of the host in the Consecration to signify a Sacramental gift of extra-utile and gratuitous form which contains and redeems all time in an eternal moment. Dilworth clarifies this:

> The structural recession of circles is symbolic of the relation to the sacrament of virtually every aspect of life (the wide-ranging content of the poem). The sacrament both contains and is contained by every period of time and every facet of human experience. In this sense, his structure is a mandala, an image of totality.[181]

The work of the Mass as we have seen provides the pattern for the work of the text: to 'work towards a totality of incorporation, a huge synthesis'.[182] Dilworth, like other critics, also elaborates the figure of the cross as the other central figure in unifying the poem. He points to Jones's references within the poem to axes, the structure of the boat with its ship body and mast, and the last lines of the poem which read: 'What did he do other | riding the Axile Tree?'.[183] Jones explicates the poem in a typically rich and suggestive description:

> In the course of writing *The Anathemata* I had occasion to consider the Tree of the Cross as the axial beam round which all things move.

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[179] Dilworth, *The Shape of Meaning*, p. 158.
[180] Dilworth, *Reading David Jones*, p. 177.
[181] Dilworth, *Reading David Jones*, p. 178.
[182] Corcoran, p. 88.
[183] Jones, *The Anathemata*, p. 243.

> There is a monastic motto which implies that the Cross stands still while the world revolves around it. Now in considering this world-dance which has for its maypole the gleaming Tree on which the world-ransom was weighed, a person of Welsh affinity may also call to mind a particular token or relic of the same Tree.[184]

This description of *The Anathemata*'s form synthesises Jones's theological preoccupation with a centric structure evoking the eternal and timeless in relation to the multiplicity and variety of history and world time. It is the eternal, static form of the Tree (emblematic of Christ's sacrifice) which judges, balances, and redeems the time which revolves around it. Jones also deftly harmonises pagan and pre-Christian time and rituals with the Christian cross and ultimate ritual of the Eucharist and Crucifixion. This mode of 'form-content' is described by Dilworth as antithesis and unity and in it other oppositions, most notably the tension between gratuity and utility is also enacted and resolved. The closed model of form in *The Anathemata* allows for a dynamic conception of the relationship between 'two strictly formal aspects': the 'progressive movement, which is diachronic or extended through time' enacted in the narrative development of the poem and its 'structure which is synchronic or simultaneously present'.[185] Rightly, the centrality of the Mass has been commented on widely. Basil Bunting who spoke as an atheist and someone 'out of sympathy with Catholicism' does justice to the theological and aesthetic importance of the Mass to the structure of *The Anathemata*:

> [The Mass provides] a complex of symbols capable of ordering and interpreting pretty well the whole of the history of the world and the whole order of nature.[186]

There is no doubt that as Soud recognises, 'Dilworth's reading is compelling, for it suggests a brilliantly successful attempt by Jones to make the poem as a whole an efficacious sign containing all history within the sacred time of the Eucharistic rite'.[187] Dilworth's model is complex and satisfyingly coherent. However, there are essential aspects of the text and

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[184] David Jones, 'Wales and the Crown', in *Epoch and Artist: Selected Writings by David Jones*, ed. by Harman Grisewood (London: Faber and Faber, 2008), pp. 39-48 (p. 39).
[185] Dilworth, *Shape of Meaning*, p. 156
[186] Basil Bunting, qtd. in Dilworth, *Shape of the Meaning*, pp. 5-6.
[187] Soud, p. 128.

especially the experience of its reading which are, if not ignored, then at least subsumed in a reading of form which is in some ways abstract and even detached from the materiality of the poem. Even Dilworth concedes that there is 'much more to the form of *The Anathemata* than spatial structure, which is so conceptual as to be for many readers, a sort of large ghost, believed in but nowhere directly experienced in its entirety'. [188] Soud is also judicious in his mediation between the opposing proponents of open and closed form. He is right to note that this is 'one more example of the false dichotomies that bedevil Jonesian criticism' and that there is 'no real conflict between those readings' which 'simply emphasize different levels of what is in fact a binary structure'. [189]

Nevertheless, a closed model such as Dilworth's does risk repeating the dichotomy especially if it favours an overly formalist reading over one which takes into account historical and cultural poetics. For example, a closed model may ignore some aspects of the materiality of the text. For instance, the footnotes which so exasperate some critics are not mentioned at all in these discussions. Neither would this model take into account the complexity and variety of linguistic registers – what Guy Davenport describes as the language variation even 'in one line, from a beautifully formal Latinate diction to the saltiest of vulgar speech'.[190] Nor does it put the poem into the context of modernist aesthetics and the immediate context of its writing in a phase of 'cultural decline' and emergence of the technocratic megapolitanism of late modernity. A reading of *The Anathemata* must take these aspects of style into account whilst also considering the cultural implications of form and the sources and inspirations of the poem's *materia poetica*.

It is in this respect where the open model offers a more flexible approach. Kathleen Staudt offers an open model in which she 'caution[s] against the impression conveyed by Dilworth's work […] that Jones writes primarily as an apologist for Christianity, for Welsh culture, or for any of the other cultural, political, and anthropological visions that he draws

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[188] Dilworth, 'Antithesis and Unity in The Anathemata', *Yale Journal of Criticism*, 13.1 (Spring 2000), pp. 67-86 (p. 67). That Dilworth uses the word ghost attests to the underlying suggestion, in line with Scholastic theological aesthetics, that form as an abstraction can never be fully realised in language or art, because embodied as we are signs partake of both body and spirit. A 'pure poetry' sought by Rimbaud or the art-for-arts-sake movement is impossible and leads to an 'aesthetic crisis'. Rowan Williams, *Grace and Necessity*, 20-21. Maritain writes that art is always a finite beauty, incomplete and an encounter with the infinite achieving only 'that kind of imperfection through which wounds the finite'. Maritain, qtd. in Williams, p. 21.

[189] Soud, p. 130.

[190] Guy Davenport, 'In Love with All Things Made', in *David Jones: Man and Poet*, ed. by John Matthias (Orono, Me.: National Poetry Foundation, University of Maine, 1989), pp. 73-75 (p. 74).

on so freely'.[191] Staudt grounds her reading of the poem's form and content in Jones's belief that man's humanity rests in sign making and as an artist. Her comparison of Jones's work to Charles Olson's aesthetics of 'Projective Verse' is illuminating in various respects and places Jones 'at the edge of modernist poetics'.[192] Olson's work shares 'affinities with Jones': Olson's 'notion of poetry tends toward the public forms of drama and epic' and he aspires to 'verse forms that will be closer to communal speech patterns and oral modes of communication' which work 'in, rather than apart from, the temporal and experiential world'.[193]

More than this, an open model foregrounds the process of 'open field composition' where 'ONE PERCEPTION MUST IMMEDIATELY AND DIRECTLY LEAD TO A FURTHER PERCEPTION' as it is enacted in the textual production and decoding of the text.[194] It suggests the 'essentially open nature of Jones's writing' and one in which *The Anathemata* 'manifests form as process, as discovery, as "invention"'.[195] The idea of invention[196] is not completely the right word as Jones did not ascribe to himself the role or powers of an original demiurge. Even if he was shaping and making new forms he knew that there 'is only one tale to tell even though the telling is patient of endless development and ingenuity and can take on a million variant forms'.[197] In line with the theological idea of *anamnesis*, sign-making 'evokes and recalls' as it is an 'effective recalling of, something loved'.[198] But the notion of searching and discovery of form is accurate. An open reading of the poem is useful to capture something of the phenomenological complexity of the excitement and exhilaration, the messiness[199] and fragmentariness of the open-ended and ongoing process

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[191] Staudt, *Turn of a Civilization*, p. 28.
[192] Staudt, *Turn of a Civilization*, p. 187.
[193] Staudt, *Turn of a Civilization*, p. 184. As Staudt concedes Jones, who emphasises his role as a public bard and is influenced by a modernist poetics of impersonality, does not share Olson's 'radical subjectivity' Staudt, *Turn of a Civilization*, p. 184. Soud also picks up on the difference, noting that 'even at his most reminiscent of Jones, Olson remains focused on the interiority of an individual consciousness', whereas *The Anathemata* 'reveals its altogether different sensibility'. '[M]ore mimetic than expressionistic' the speakers in the poem (Soud cites the speaker in 'Keel, Ram, Stauros', but not the more rounded and layered character, Elen, The Lady of the Pool) are types and generic, and Jones is 'unconcerned with the inner experience of the characters he describes'. Soud, *Divine Cartographies*, p. 126.
[194] Olson qtd. in Staudt, *Turn of a Civilization*, p. 184.
[195] Corcoran, *Song of Deeds*, p. 43.
[196] The word does make sense if we consider its Latin root as finding out or discovery.
[197] Jones, *The Anathemata*, p. 35.
[198] Jones, The Anathemata, p. 21.
[199] I am indebted in part to Paul Stanbridge's reading of messiness in David Jones's *The Anathemata*. See Paul Stanbridge, 'The Messy Making of David Jones's *Anathemata*', Moveable Type, 5 (2009), p. 1-18 < http://www.ucl.ac.uk/moveable-type/pdfs/2008-9/Paul_Stanbridge.pdf> [accessed 14 September 2017]

of writing *and* reading that seems to unfold in *The Anathemata* as it self-reflexively enacts Jones's search for form whilst we follow through the sometimes labyrinthine passages of the text.

As a corrective to the exceptionally neat and contained readings of form offered by Dilworth, and even Goldpaugh's labyrinth model (discussed below), it is important to underscore the fact that Jones, who struggled tremendously with the task of finding a shape confessed that is was a 'very rambling affair – sometimes it all seems balls and sometimes I like it in places'.[200] Jones felt that whereas *In Parenthesis* 'was chained to a sequence of events which always made it a straightforward affair', *The Anathemata*, certainly early on during its writing process felt very different, 'about "ideas"' – and ideas that do not always cohere, but were a 'mess'.[201] Jones's methods of and his insecurities about writing are one thing, but they become part of the text itself. Jones refused to sacrifice the ideas and materials fascinating to him totally to the completion of form. The attraction and frustration of digression, complexity and magic of metamorphosis and messiness are an integral part of the overall shape itself. The poem contains its own gaps, difficulties and extraneous materials. This profusion becomes a sign of itself: a sign of gratuity and the ongoing and inexhaustible creativity of the world and man. Jones continues to Grisewood,

> It is about how everything turns into something else, and how you can never tell when a bonza is cropping up or the Holy Ghost is going to turn something inside out, and how everything is a balls-up and a kind of 'Praise' at the same time.[202]

In other words, formlessness and even the chaotic associative chains of allusions and interconnections are congruent and not contrary to the theological or aesthetic aims of the text, and in part they have their own unique place. Jones attributed this problem to the very nature of the type of long work he was trying out:

> I see now why chaps write about 'separate' things in short poems – to wit, odes to nightingales and what not – but it seems to me that if you just talk about a lot of

[200] David Jones, Letter to Harman Grisewood, 31 May 1938, *Dai Greatcoat*, p. 86.
[201] David Jones, *Dai Greatcoat*, p. 86.
[202] David Jones, *Dai Greatcoat*, p. 86.

> things as one thing follows on another, in the end you may have made a shape out of it all. That is to say, that shape that all the mess makes in your mind.[203]

I concede that these are the thoughts of an artist at the nascent stages of a huge project that would take every bit of the ten years he hoped he might have for the writing and shaping of the 'disjointed and rambling' thing it began as.[204] And it would go through many changes.[205] But at the start Jones realises the value of disunity and process which may make it the 'kind of thing in sections with only the continuity of my own rambling mind to give it a kind of unity'.[206] As if to underline the very fragility, and yet vitally necessary value of art and its process (vis-a-vis utilitarian instrumentalist production), especially in his present context leading up to the outbreak of war, Jones observes how 'strangely unconnected' from the 'hard steel world' his endeavour seems.[207] Furthermore, the extended drafting process and the seeming unfinishedness of the final poem suggest Jones is working once again at the limit of modernist aesthetics between the quest for contained form and the continued activity of form-making. For Jones, process is as important as the final product. Hence, the continued correlations drawn between artist making throughout human history. These wonderfully associative and even seemingly improvisational connections are not displaced in the process of making of form. They are like a conversation between friends of value in and of themselves. Because Jones conceives them as 'praise' and a way 'things are conditioned by other things', they remain part of the final text we call *The Anathemata*.[208]

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[203] David Jones, *Dai Greatcoat*, p. 86.
[204] David Jones, Letter to Harman Grisewood and Helen Ede, 11 May 1938, *Dai Greatcoat*, p. 91.
[205] This said, Stanbridge challenges both Dilworth and Goldpaugh's genetic readings for overstating the deterministic concentric model of a circular node (the mass) or the unifying narrative around which other narratives are added (the layering of a protective 'temenos'). He argues that their readings of the 'foliational code is mistaken'. First, in terms of complexity, as insertions were made within centres preceding and after the supposed crux points (he provides his own tabular collation of the working genesis of the poem) which 'undermines' their 'neat and tidy reading'. Second, the critics, tending to rely on the foliational order' as a 'reading of the intended form not as *effect* of Jones's way of working, not his way of working itself. The distinction is subtle but it allows Stanbridge to take into account the notion of 'mess' in the making and form of *The Anathemata*. Stanbridge, 'Messy Making', pp. 8- 9.
[206] David Jones, *Dai Greatcoat*, p. 91.
[207] David Jones, *Dai Greatcoat*, p. 91. It seems that the origin of the text was deeply affected by two extremely traumatic events: the war and his heartbreak over Prudence Pelham's marriage. This goes at least a little way to explain the shelter Jones sought in his writing. He felt that he could not cope with the political situation and wanted to retreat into his art 'which is all I really care about'. Yet the next sentence of his letter admits that he 'think[s] all the time about Prudence but don't get any clearer about how to face up to it'. David Jones, Letter to Harman Grisewood, 23 June 1939, *Dai Greatcoat*, p. 93.
[208] David Jones, *Dai Greatcoat*, p. 91.

Naturally, such apparent open-endedness, especially given *The Antathemata*'s digressive and interrupted narrative structure creates anxiety and frustration. As we have seen with the reception of Crane's *The Bridge*, critics become extremely uncomfortable when faced with the apparent formlessness or perceived lack of an obvious unifying structure of a long poem – especially if they require formal closure to ensure the 'success' of the work. John Holloway worries that the 'immense elaboration' simply amounts to a failed poem in which 'one relation [is] repeated over and over, an endless catachresis of hinted identity, thrown off from a diffused agitation of particulars, a quasi-free association, a recession and thickness, a trans-finite array of not-plannedness'.[209] While this extreme view of *The Anathemata* as a wandering aimless collection of fragments may appear on the surface to be justified, even encouraged by Jones, it clearly listens to Jones only when he complains of modernity's fragmented condition. It fails to listen when he suggests ways of shaping and making forms which embodies both the haphazard *and* the patient faith in finding pattern and shapes. Considered alone, it also fails to take cognisance of the validity of models of form offered up by critics such as Dilworth. A balanced reading of Jones's formal concerns in *The Anathema* must take cognisance of both centre and fragment, unity and diversity in relation to one another. Moreover, these tensions are made apparent in the very materiality and textuality of the work itself as the struggles between formlessness and form or profusion and containment are manifest in the style of the work. Most obvious is the interpenetration of poetry with prose, typographical spacing, the inclusion of blocks of inscription, and the footnotes themselves. Jones wrote to Father Desmond Chute about his idiosyncratic method of composition balancing what he saw as the 'inner necessities of the thing itself' with the experimental oddity and range of forms, rhythms, that encompass the poem.[210] He concedes he works with an 'eclectic or patch work or catch-as-catch-can method' which still demands the 'precision' and artistry of poetic form.[211] Theologically, the

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[209] John Holloway, *The Colours of Clarity: Essays on Contemporary Literature and Education* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1964), pp. 113-123 (p. 122). Holloway also dismisses the poem as an epic on the opposite grounds. *The Anathema* now fails because it is not comprehensive enough, and therefore cannot be a valid 'resurrection of the mythos of the people of Britain'. It is too narrow and specific and focuses on London at the expense of Durham, Canterbury, or Winchester, and is too full of Geoffrey of Monmouth and not Shakespeare, nor the English Prayer book, or Authorized version pf the Bible. His point is obvious: Jones errs on the side of the representation of a Latinate, Catholic and Welshness, while not portraying the Anglican and English. Holloway, p. 119-120. Also, qtd. in Blamires, *David Jones*, pp. 196-197.

[210] Cited in Staudt, Turn of a Civilization, p. 189.

[211] Cited in Staudt, Turn of a Civilization, pp. 189-190.

notion of the inner necessities suggests the Aristotelian Scholastic notion of things that possess in an intransitive sense their own teleological necessity and purpose. The poem enacts its own hunt for form.

This chimes with Jones's description of the fluid meanings and free-association of the poem in which he tries to capture the effervescence of ideas and movements of thought through which '[y]ou can go around the world and back again, in and out the meanders, down the history-paths, survey *religio* and *superstitio*, call back many yesterdays'.[212] Or elsewhere where Jones describes the search for form as a hunt in an entangled cultural space. In this quest to discover and to capture or to kill form, figured as 'quarry' in a 'vast, densely wooded, an inherited and entailed domain', Jones emphasises in vivid detail the stealthy process of stalking form in a mysterious and sacred wood.

> The 'specific factor' to be captured will be pungent with the smell of, asperged with the dew of, those thickets. The *venator poeta* cannot escape that tangled brake. It is within such a topography that he will feel forward, from a find to a check, from a check to a view, from a view to a possible kill: in the morning certainly, but also in the lengthening shadows.[213]

The allusive density of this prose with its associations of dew with holy water, the smell of incense and of the hunt for prey evoke a sacred quest which the poet undertakes in an enchanted landscape, whether in the dawn of cultural fullness or the shadowy decline of civilizational night. Its rhythm, with accumulation of clauses, movement creeping towards, balancing expectation and anticipation with desire and stillness of precision is noticeable in the very texture of the lines. Many passages of *The Anathemata* exhibit this formal and stylistic patterning with insistent questions, variations in movement treading carefully between the rhythmical, enjambment and fractured lines broken by empty space and density of prose sections. An apposite example is the description of the sympathetic magic of the depiction of the hunt on the walls of the sacred cathedral space of the Lascaux caves:

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[212] Jones, *The Anathemata*, p. 32.

[213] Jones, *The Anathemata*, p. 20. Such a description immediately evokes Jones's later poem 'The Hunt'. David Jones, 'The Hunt', *The Sleeping Lord and Other Fragments* (London: Faber and Faber, 1995), pp. 65-69.

But already he's at it
the form-making proto-maker
busy at the fecund image of her. […]
And see how they run, the juxtaposed forms,
brighting the vaults of Lascaux; how the linear is wedded
to volume, how they do, within, in an unbloody manner,
under the forms of brown haematite and black manganese on
the grave lime-face what is done, without,
far on the windy tundra
at the kill
that the kindred may have life.[214]

Part of Jones's quest seems to be to create a curiosity, a sense of wonder and aesthetic attention to the particulars and patterns in the things he 'edifies' or sets up. Frustrated about the question of influence which was raised in the reception of *The Anathemata* by academics and critics, an exasperated Jones tried to explain his working method as 'to see how the business of "form" and "content" worked', how he could '"transubstantiate"' the qualities of things into form. He argued that he tried 'to proceed […] "from the known to the unknown"' in order to capture the '"mystery", "subtlety", or "fragility" or "waywardness" or "complexity"', all 'the blasted stuff [which] is there plain as a pike staff"'.[215] Jones enacts the process of hunting for forms which have a deeply personal significance, but also to reveal an 'ontology' of a 'universe that is inextricably both material and significative'.[216] He calls us to attend to 'the creaturely and immediate, and involvement, known or unknown, in the making of meaning or the uncovering of connection'.[217]

There are various ways of suggesting the nature of the form without either the constraints of a closed reading or acceding to supposed unmanageable formlessness. The search for meaningful shape and form often focuses on the cluster of meaning around symbols with the text and which provide a meta-textual lens with which to focus

[214] Jones, *The Anathemata,* p. 60.
[215] David Jones, Letter to René Hague, 22 May 1962, *Dai Greatcoat*, p. 189.
[216] Rowan Williams, *Grace and Necessity*, p. 75.
[217] Williams, *Grace and Necessity*, p. 75.

interpretation. In this mode, various symbols may be chosen. The ship is a possible one, but stone, water and wood are good examples as they are particularly malleable and recurring figures. For Jeremy Hooker, David Jones provides the key when he glosses the following lines with the note that 'Vergil […] [b]y whatever means of fusion he hands down three of the permanent symbols for us to make use of':

> Within the laughless Megaron
> the margaron
> beyond echelon'd Skaian
> the stone
> the fonted water
> the fronded wood.[218]

Around these *anathemata* coalesce a cluster of meanings which gather in Christian, primitive religion and mythical resonances and are repeated in various ways throughout the poem creating a sense of shape. Hooker also points to the significance of the initiation rite which Jones would have gleaned from his avid reading of W. F. Jackson Knight. Another spatial form is key in this interpretation's aim to close off or enclose the openness of the poem: the 'labyrinth', which is 'intimately connected with the ritual' is often a 'tomb or cave' in which the sacred rites take place, and like the womb is a site of re-birth.[219] Also 'mazes' are 'boundaries, or symbolic boundaries between worlds or realities' which 'embodies the pattern of imitation, into two opposed but inter-related forms of order'.[220] As is typical of this type of myth-criticism inspired as much by Eliade as Catholicism, the spatial representation of the labyrinth in the text is implicitly translated into a model of the psyche and by extension of culture which is structured around archetypal patterns and rituals through oppositions and cycles which in various forms are given geological, seasonal, liturgical or cosmic inflections.

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[218] Jones, *The Anathemata*, n. 2, p. 56. Jeremy Hooker, 'In the Labyrinth: An Exploration of *The Anathemata*', in in *David Jones: Man and Poet*, ed. by John Matthias (Orono, Me.: National Poetry Foundation, University of Maine, 1989), pp. 263-284.
[219] Hooker, 'In the Labyrinth', p. 279.
[220] Hooker, 'In the Labyrinth', p. 279.

Tom Goldpaugh develops the use of this figure, extending the figure of the labyrinth beyond an 'evocative cultural symbol'[221] into more of a meta-textual tool which helps to explain not only the meaning within the text, but more significantly how to conceptualise and interpret the composition and construction of various drafts and iterations of the texts. This provides a useful way of understanding both the genesis of the poem combined with the readerly experience of the poem, and matches the internal symbolism and material which Jones used in the poem itself. Ultimately, Goldpaugh's conclusion is that in the process of drafting, as well as in the opposition within the poem's symbolic patterning, Jones translated a prison-like maze, the 'Daedalian labyrinth', into the finished product, a 'sacred enclosure' or 'temenos'.[222] Rather than a formless and disorientating space (akin to the megapolitan cosmopolis), this is a 'protective labyrinth, one that would literally enclose within it the endangered signa of the culture'.[223] Jones writes in 'The Tutelar of the Place':

> In all times of *Gleichschaltung*, in the days of the central economies,
> set up the hedges of illusion round some remnant of us, twine the
> wattles of mist, white-web a Gwydion-hedge
> like fog on the *bryniau*
> against the commissioners
> and assessors bearing the writs of the Ram to square the world-
> floor and number the tribes and write down the secret things and take away the
> diversities by which we are, by which we call on your name.[224]

The advantage of Goldpaugh's reading of the form as a labyrinth is that it provides a flexible way of understanding *The Anathema* (and its pre-existing versions) in terms of an open and closed form which seeks to grasp the unity-in-diversity which so characterises Jones's entire oeuvre. It explains how Jones worked to develop the poem as 'a series of long elaborations and digressions within digressions'.[225]

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[221] Tom Goldpaugh, 'Mapping the Labyrinth', p. 255.
[222] Tom Goldpaugh, 'Mapping the Labyrinth', p. 255.
[223] Tom Goldpaugh, 'The Labyrinthine Text of David Jones', in *David Jones: Diversity in Unity: Studies of his Literary and Visual Art*, ed. by Belinda Humfrey and Anne Price-Owen (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2000), pp. 132-152 (p. 144).
[224] David Jones, 'The Tutelar of the Place', *The Sleeping Lord*, p. 63.
[225] Staudt, *Turn of a Civilization*, 188.

Whilst there is substantial and compelling evidence for all interpretations of the form, I would like to concentrate on three interrelated models, interlacing, the text as codex and the text as archive or archaeological site. I will treat these latter two as if they are seamlessly intertwined. The fusion of these models of form best captures not only the formal intricacies of the poetry itself, but like Goldpaugh's excellent use of the labyrinth, suggests a way to understand Jones's intertextual method of creation and writing, and also provides a meta-textual mode of interpretation useful in the deciding of the text. Finally, I think that these models of form add an extra essential cultural and contextual background necessary to understand the place of *The Anathemata* as a piece of writing by a poet of Welsh origin and fascinated with a specific seam of Britain's history, written in a particular modernist inflected mode during the Second World War, and informed by Jones's antipathy to his civilizational situation which threatened to devalue and destroy his *materia poetica*.

First, the model of an open and interlaced form is best described, as Jones intimates in his essays, in terms of Celtic artistic styles. Such an explication acknowledges Jones's deep and abiding love for Celtic heritage and culture (something which can be lost in the other explications of form) and suggests a way of his ensuring the continuity of cultural material in the very form and content of the poem itself.[226] In an anthology of a millennia of Welsh verse which Jones read with close attention, Gwyn Williams describes the elements of the Welsh style:

> The absence of a centred design, of an architectural quality, is not a weakness of old Welsh poetry [remember Arnold said it was], but it results quite reasonably from a specific view of composition. English and most Western European creative activity has been conditioned by the inheritance from Greece and Rome of the notion of a central point of interest in a poem, a picture or a play, a nodal region to which everything leads and upon which everything depends. The dispersed nature of the thematic splintering of Welsh poetry is not due to a failure to follow this classical

[226] Both Paul Robichaud and William Wootten argue that this Celtic aesthetic is filtered in part though Wilhelm Worringer's ideas on the Northern line. There is a correlation between aesthetic and ideological interpretation of the styles. For example, in *Abstraction and Empathy*, Worringer divides two artistic styles according to an opposition between rational abstraction and empathetic organicism: 'Just as the urge to empathize as a presumption of aesthetic experience finds its gratification in the beauty of the organic, so the urge to abstraction finds its beauty in the life-denying inorganic, in the crystalline, or, in general terms, in all abstract law'. Robichaud, p. 151.

> convention. Anerin, Gwalchmai, Cynddelw and Hywel ab Owain were not trying to write poems that would read like Greek tragedies or even Gothic cathedrals, but, rather like stone circles or the contour-following rings of the forts from which they fought, with hidden ways slipping from one ring to another. More obviously, their writing was like the inter-woven inventions preserved in early Celtic manuscripts and on stone crosses, where what happens in a corner is as important as what happens at the centre, because there often is no centre.[227]

For Jones this was an explication of his poetic method of writing and justification for the type of poem he created. It suggests the interdependence of ideas within the text, eschews the dominance of one single centre or controlling idea. The notion of Celtic fort-defences as protection would have meant much to Jones as an infantryman and with his sense of military continuity between different epochs. It also corresponded with Jones's own characterisation of the artist as a 'fifth-column-ist' guerrilla who needed elusive tactics and codes to survive and create in the hostile 'No-Man's-land of the historic-present'.[228] Its archaeological references are immediately relevant. Formally, however, the statement makes some sense of the layered narrative structure of the poem which is characterised by digressions and overlapping time frames. It accounts for the threads of narrative voyages that are woven throughout the text. Patrick Deane has commented on the idiosyncratic narrative form which defies a single sequential linearity, but instead it is characterised by multiplicity, circularity, digression and convolution.[229] There is no central journey, but many voyages. There is no arrival, but many returns to the journey. The look-out on the ship from Phoenicia tries to announce land in vain, but he is interrupted several times by the narration which plunges back and forth in time.[230] Also, although there is a consistent voice throughout the poem, there are a range of speakers and perspectives included within the poem. Even when the speaker of the poem narrates he/she signals a decentering of

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[227] Gwyn Williams, *The Burning Tree: Poems from the First Thousand Years of Welsh Verse* (London: Faber and Faber, 1956). William Blissett remembers that David Jones was impressed by this and cited it in a letter to him approvingly. William Blissett, 'The Welsh Thing in Here', in *David Jones: Artist and Poet*, ed. by Paul Hills (Aldershot: Scolar, 1997), pp 101-121 (p. 115).
[228] David Jones, 'Religion and the Muses', p. 100, p. 105.
[229] Patrick Deane, 'The Fate of Narrative in David Jones's Anathemata', *University of Toronto Quarterly*, 57.2 (Winter 1987/88), p. 306-320.
[230] Deane, p. 313.

personality by persistently trying to get into the experience of his sailors and explorers as they encounter and discover Britain. Elsewhere, Elen's narrative is constantly side-tracked by theological speculation, romantic reminiscences, and the standard sailor's yarns. The absence of a centre simply means that there are many centres.

Internally, in any single passage, there are a myriad correspondences, interconnections and allusions, and digressions and interruptions, which themselves thread in and out as they are woven into the fabric of other central points of images within the text. A fine example is the lengthy and ornate description of a woman who is bowing by candlelight at an altar during midnight Mass.[231] In an elaborate verbal tour-de force the portrait is transformed with reference to a host of other archetypal feminine figures alluded to throughout the poem: the Venus of Willendorf, Helenê and Selenê, Diana or Artemis, Athena, Demeter, Mary Magdalene, Vanabride or Freyja, Gwenhwyfar, and, more contemporaneously, Emma Hamilton, the 'British Venus', and even the fashionable women from high society portrayed in magazines of the 1930s.[232] These kinds of connections are interlaced with references to her physical form and clothing as the description is deftly modulated between a kind of Pre-Raphaelite hyper-realism and a portrait of mythical, historical and religious depth and complexity.[233] Jones describes her attire using the elements of intricate sound and visual patterning:

> in
>
> cloth of the Grass of Troy and spun Iberian asbestos, and under
> these ornate wefts the fine-abb'd Eblana flax, maid-worked
> […]
> braced bright, sternal and vertebral, to the graced bones bound.[234]

A closer analysis of the passage reveals the style in detail:

> And from where over-grown and under-grown and *linea*

[231] Jones, *The Anathemata*, pp. 194-206.
[232] See Dilworth, *Reading David Jones*, pp. 163-167. For a close explication of the feminine in The Anathema see Staudt, *Turn of a Civilization*, pp. 139-157.
[233] It might be more accurate to refer to Albrecht Dürer's, 'The Madonna with the Iris' 1500-10 which Jones mentions directly in the description.
[234] Jones, *The Anathemata*, p. 198.

draped the clavicled torus of it, her neck-shaft of full entasis,
as though of Parian that never ages, still as a megalith, and as
numinous:
yet, as limber to turn
as the poised neck at the forest-fence
between find and view
too quick, even for the eyes of the gillies of Arthur, but seen
of the forest-ancraman (he had but one eye)
between decade and *Gloria*.

Downward from this terminal,
down from the wide shoulders (for she was a daughter of the
*tyrannoi* of Britain.[235]

Her neck is rendered statuesque, timeless, and perfect, suggestive of Greek marble and more ancient and holy origins. From the still and perhaps lifeless description, the line breaks into the empty contemplative space of the page. The statue comes alive in the alert and living quality of her poised neck and a glimpse of her is rare and almost impossible. She is evoked with a sense of mercurial mystery and unpredictability. Significantly it is the textural association of the threads and lines of her clothing which have transformed the image and the rhythm of the description which is now alliterative and quickened. Jones, then sets off the description and a wide space separates the description. He then returns with the repeated prompt of the 'terminal' and the sculptured form of the woman. The downward movement of the eye traces her shoulder and her genealogy to her tribal origins which sets off another digression into the sources and origins of her boots and jewellery. She is a native woman but she is clothed and adorned in materials sourced from far and wide. What draws us back to the unfinished description is repetition of the word 'Downward', and in another repetition, he describes her neck once again in terms of 'numinous' sculptured forms. But

[235] Jones, *The Anathemata*, p. 198.

now a new word with a different emphasis enters the portrayal, one in counter-point: 'over'.[236] And it is abruptly connected to a direct intervention by the speaker:

> We are not concerned with portrait
> but it can be inferred that of her eyes, one was blemish'd.[237]

If the interjection is partly ironic, suggesting a gentle admonishment (it is hardly effective) to the continuing profuse depiction, it is also self-critically justifying. Jones is not concerned with realism. His is a representation, and a re-calling, a sign under the form of words, and connective to a tradition of words entangled in history and myth. Nevertheless, the 'description' continues. This time with the phrase 'over', which becomes the next seemingly logical and syntactical link: 'Over other than all this'; 'moreover'; 'And on and over the stone'; 'perhaps from over the Sleeve'; and, finally 'over the Stone'.[238] The word 'over' is repeated at intervals throughout the continuing intricate and richly textured description of her 'Dalmatian tunic of gold stuff inter-threaded green', her 'glossy under-gown of shining firestones', and her 'dappled' furs as her figure is described intermittently with light and enfolding movement. This effect is reinforced by the alternating blocks of prose and fluid enjambment of poetry. Finally,

> the proud column
> leaned.[239]

and receives the host as the words which echo throughout the entire poem are uttered by the priest:

> DO THIS
> For my Anamnesis.
> By whom also this column was.[240]

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[236] Jones, *The Anathemata*, p. 202.
[237] Jones, *The Anathemata*, p. 199.
[238] Jones, *The Anathemata*, p. 202, p. 203, p. 203, p. 204, p. 205.
[239] Jones, *The Anathemata*, p. 204.
[240] Jones, *The Anathemata*, p. 205.

In eleven pages of exquisite and layered renderings her actions are very simple: She stands, moves forward slowly, and leans over to bend down to receive communion. However, Jones embellishes and patterns the description to become its own sign of her movement and a sign of the history of her people in the context of the pivotal moment in the Mass.[241] Since the language 'approximates the verbal richness of *cynhanedd* in medieval Welsh poetry' it acts as a double sign: its richness of sound and visual patterning in words creates the effect whilst it also 'constitute[s] a continual historical allusion' which reinforces the 'historical setting of this Celtic queen'.[242] Jones also attempts to guide the reader as to what type of reading he intends. This is not just through the speaker's intervention, but through the overt references to eyes and the movements of looking. Jones wants us to see the physical body of the woman as continuous with the historical and cultural body of the tradition of Britain.[243]

The passage could also be read as an elaboration on the epic simile or conceits, and as we shall see, provides a contrasting parallel with Walcott's ambivalent use of, and anxiety over, how to portray his St. Lucian Helen in terms of classical analogies. Whilst Walcott will avoid such dense historical allusions for his own aesthetic and ideological reasons, Jones sees it as part of his recovery and celebration of the history of a British past. In the very adaptation of a form of Celtic poetics, Jones suggests the life of a local queen of 'breathing marble' and 'native the warm blood in the blue | veins that vein the hidden marbles, the lifted abacus of native gold'.[244] He also renders her in an act of poetic transubstantiation which occurs as the Sacrament of the Eucharist is transformed, into her own 'sign the whole anatomy of Britain'[245] legitimated and authorised, not solely by the portrait or the artist making, but by the 'valid sign' of the Mass endorsing the sign of her 'under the form of the Cross'.

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[241] I would argue from a centrist reading that this is in fact the core moment of the whole poem.
[242] Dilworth, *Reading David Jones*, p. 167; Dilworth, *Shape of the Meaning*, p. 321; Dilworth, *Reading David Jones*, p. 167.
[243] I am aware that there is an element of the male gaze at work here and the aestheticisation of the feminine body into form which may be explored. Certainly, there is an erotic tension between the desire for completion and the fluid movement. That this is in relationship to the sensuality and performance of the mass suggests a much more complex reading of the Mass and the erotic beyond the scope of this thesis.
[244] Jones, *The Anathemata*, p. 204.
[245] Jones, *The Anathemata*, p. 204.

In this example of Celtic inspired interlacing, Jones saw a continuity in the 'elaboration of forms' in which the Celtic 'culture complex […] intricate arabesques of Kells' are 'clearly observable from La Tene to *Finnegans Wake*'.[246] Wootten, who connects the aesthetic with Wilhem Worringer's ideas on Northern aesthetics, marks out a passage from Worringer which is particularly characteristic of aspects of Jones's style:

> The very peculiar interlacing of words and sentences in early Northern poetry, its artful chaos of interrelated ideas, the expressive rhythm imposed upon it by alliteration and the intricate repletion of the initial sounds (corresponding to the repletion of motives in ornament and producing in the same way the character of a confused, unending melody), all these are unmistakable analogies to Northern ornament.[247]

The interlacing of abstraction and embodiment is an indication of what Jones saw in the Celtic as the interplay between the 'elusive hardness, a bent towards the intricate and towards the abstract' and the more commonly and problematically romanticised, 'magical setting' of Celtic origins in 'misted *insulae*, the white enclosures, the transparencies of water'.[248] This dynamic is revealed through the patterning of lines and texture – the columns, the marble, in relation to the living body of the woman, the light and folds of her dress. The description of her as 'breathing marble' sums up the reconciliation of these two influences. Implicit in this kind of aesthetic connection is a deeper cultural one: Jones's belief in the unity of a European cultural substrate. Just as Wootten argues that Jones was 'attempting to set up the canons for taste for a Welsh/Celtic literary and visual art'[249] which would be local and rooted in the Welsh hills and landscape, Jones is also suggesting that there are deep and pervasive connections to a European history.

Properly defined interlacing is a property of style as well as form. It is suggestive of another model and conception of form – one which is perhaps obvious but implicit in all of

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[246] David Jones, 'The Heritage of Early Britain', in *Epoch and Artist*, pp. 196-201 (p. 198-199).
[247] Qtd. in William Wootten, 'Basil Bunting, British Modernism and the Time of the Nation' in *The Star You Steer by: Basil Bunting and British Modernism*, ed. by James McGonigal and Richard Price (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2000), pp.17-35, (pp. 23-24).
[248] Jones, 'The Heritage of Early Britain', p. 198-199.
[249] Wootten, 'The Aesthetics of History', p. 35.

Jones's work: the text as text. Jones was obsessed with them, as an auto-didact immersed in a world of books and letters he would naturally conceive of his written work as a process of collating and collecting, organising and ornamenting material textual forms. Aside from the obvious – occupation as an engraver and artist – two anecdotes corroborate this observation in tangential but illuminating ways. First, Jones's obsession with paper and textual artistry is most apparent in the idiosyncratic style of the letters he wrote. Not merely a utile means of communication, the letters became artworks themselves:

> He usually wrote on unlined foolscap paper, leaving wide margins for subsequent glosses. If a point is unresolved in the main text, or in need of further illustration, he comes back to it in these glosses, frequently using a different–coloured ink. [250]

To receive a letter from Jones was to receive an intricate form of interlacing of daily news, preoccupations and ideas organised in a unique layout. This interweaving of form-making was also part of his planning and conception of the cultural, religious and literary history of Britain. To illustrate this Jones drew a 'Chart of Sources for Arthurian Legends of Themes in the Artist's Mind'.[251] The mind map shows different coloured arrows of influence and trajectories emanating from and proceeding to historical periods or specific locations and even historical figures. Read chronologically, the map seems to proceed downwards in time. However, the connections between the cultural and religious influences are mapped visually in a complex non-linear shape. Attached to each label are Jones's notes referring to different aspects of religious and cultural influence. Some have question marks, others are bold and definitive, and others are tentative dotted lines. Located on the left, Wales and Cornwall feature with several red arrows pointing inwards from the label which suggests multiple discursive sources:

> 'MYTH + HISTORY + PSEUDO-HISTORY IN
> NORTH BRITAIN WALES & S.W. BRITAIN[252]

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[250] Richard Wald, qtd. in Andrew Campbell, 'Strata and Bedrock in David Jones's *Anathémata*', *Renascence*, 46.2 (Winter 1994), pp. 117-131 (p. 117).
[251] 'Chart of Sources for Arthurian Legends of Themes in the Artist's Mind' 1943. http://www.tate.org.uk/art/archive/items/tga-8222-1-68/jones-chart-of-sources-for-arthurian-legends
[252] 'Chart of Sources for Arthurian Legends of Themes in the Artist's Mind' 1943.

In the centre of the diagram is located the French and German Romance. Bold black arrows point towards it from Greece and Rome and Byzantium and veer diagonally downwards to the date '1469 Malory'. Importantly for my argument, while the map is full of details illustrating the evolution of Britain's cultural complex, as any modern student's study notes may be, the map also functions as an abstraction becoming, like Jones's inscriptions, a piece of art. These diagrams were ways Jones sought to understand the relationships between things and map his thoughts as a form of reference and planning for his poetry.

Jones sought to combine something approximate to the Celtic style into his literary and historical endeavours. What this suggests is that form and content become symbiotic and that the textual patterning is as much part of the message and meaning as the concepts or ideas. To read these 'works' requires an aesthetic sensibility as well as a historical background informed by particular British history. The aim of such illustrations was partly to fascinate, even mesmerise. This provides an associative connection with Jones's interest in 'medieval northern art' which then 'directly shape[d] the development of unique modernist form'.[253] Jones makes the connection explicit when he praises the unification of the abstract and visible in Celtic art and links this to Joyce's work:

> It was just this total oneness of form and content that the unflinching integrity of Joyce was determined to achieve in literary form; it was not for nothing that he looked steadfastly at a page from Kells.[254]

In the Book of Kells or similar medieval books I think we may find a useful model for the form and shape of *The Anathemata*. Circumstantial credence for this is ascertained from Jones's decision to include illustrations and works of art within the text. Originally, he had intended that the footnotes were to be laid typographically downwards, but the job proved unmanageable for the printers. Jones wanted his work to integrate word and image, and sought a text that could combine a variety of linguistic forms and speech patterns together, while also providing a gloss or a commentary to the content. This connection is suggested

[253] Robichaud, p. 154.
[254] Jones, 'Welsh Poetry, p. 63-64.

by Edward T. Wheeler after receiving a letter from Jones in which he had asked a question about Gerard Manley Hopkins:

> The whole arrangement called to mind the *catena* (Latin for 'chain') of ancient sources, a codex that presents short passages of Scripture centered on the page and surrounded by patristic comment. In the catena, the effect is in some ways beautiful, impossible to follow linearly and almost yearning in its attempt to offer a summation of meaning. The visual elaboration seems to confess failure to do the words justice, despite the number of commentaries, for this is the inexhaustible Logos. Jones's letter revealed a similar impulse—a determination to pursue meanings, to extend the original utterance in necessary ways.[255]

To consider *The Anathemata* as such a textual object makes sense of the footnotes. The footnotes, in this regard, should not be viewed as extraneous or serving the purpose of erudite authority. They are neither definitive nor absolute, but part of a continuing tradition of exegesis and commentary. In fact, Jones, points to the opposite in the preface. He disclaims the 'pretensions whatever of a didactic nature' asserting that the sources are there 'only to elucidate a background'.[256] He refers to them as a digression or point of information as if made by a traveller on a journey as a kind of literary Baedeker to 'tell his audience what the locals averred of those' phenomena encountered along the way.[257] As a running commentary of amateurish ethnographic and anthropological nature, these notes are to be viewed as an integral meta-textual layer to the experience of reading – like the extended comments by subsequent scholars.

However, Jones insists that they are to be considered as a unified part of the book. Jones makes clear his intention to print the notes 'along with it, rather than at the back of the book', because they are 'immediately relevant to its form'.[258] Inevitably they signal the textual and material nature of the book as book. In doing this, like the codex manuscripts

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[255] Edward T. Wheeler, 'Out of the Trenches: The Difficult Genius of David Jones' *Commonweal*, 11 October 2011 < https://www.commonwealmagazine.org/out-trenches> [accessed 16 September 2017]
[256] Jones, *The Anathemata*, p. 42.
[257] Jones, *The Anathemata*, p. 43.
[258] Jones, *The Anathemata*, p. 43.

passed down by scholars, they reveal the traces and lines of accumulated reflection and inquiry related to the materials and deposits of history.

Notwithstanding Jones's aspirations, *The Anathemata*, however, seems far from a unified book. It is a proliferation of versions, adaptations, texts, sources and commentaries. Jones suggests as much through his description of it as fragments, and he singles out its partiality and contingency. Ghosting Nennius the 9th century historian, Jones suggests it is a '"heap of all that I could find"', and he shares the justification for Nennius's writing of history: it is prompted by an '"inward wound" caused by 'the fear that certain things dear to him "should be like smoke dissipated"'.[259] Thus, 'not trusting my own learning, which is none at all,' he will draw from a vast array of '"writings and monuments of the ancient inhabitants of Britain"' to "'annals, chronicles, histories"' and other sources of historical materials.[260] This combines the element of idiosyncratic with the self-constructedness of the text. Jones sees his history as a making on a continuum with other forms of art.

Several implications are key here to understand how *The Anathemata* 'includes history' and how it functions as a modernist epic exhibiting the innovation of form and structure characteristic of the aesthetics of late modernism. First, Jones extends the bounds of the book to encompass many forms of a variety of things (*anathemata*) of textual and non-textual nature. Since everything signifies Jones is able to include in his material the very landscape and features which have become embedded in layers of myth, legends and cultural associations. His aesthetic is fragmentary and assimilative. His content is a 'mixed data', but predominantly the 'Western Christian *res*, as inherited by a person whose perceptions are totally conditioned and limited by and dependent upon his being indigenous to this island' and is necessarily 'insular'.[261] The text exhibits two aspects which will sometimes be in tension: the insular, the rooted and the myth of origins and the expansive, the diverse, and myths of voyages. Jones realises too that this will mean his text is necessarily polygot, drawing from a range of linguistic sources, mostly Welsh, Latin, 'within a kind of Cockney setting'.[262] *The Anathemata* is not just one text in one language, but an entire archive. It is a palimpsest, and, figuratively, an archival space.

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[259] Jones, *The Anathemata*, p. 9.
[260] Jones, *The Anathemata*, p. 9.
[261] Jones, *The Anathemata*, p. 9, p. 11.
[262] Jones, *The Anathemata*, p. 11.

Second, Jones's antipathy towards modernity and more specifically the location during the crisis and violence of two world wars necessitates the reason for the text: to store, to protect and to preserve the artefacts of the past. To the role of artist as priest, Jones adds the role of artist as collector and curator. The root of curator suggests guardian and has in its multiple meanings, from the Latin 'to care for', and also suggests 'cure'. Further on in the preface, Jones describes his duty as 'something of a vicar whose job is legatine – a kind of Servus Servorum to deliver what has been delivered to him, who can neither add to nor take from the deposits'.[263] Storage of cultural memories, and by necessity its organisation, is vital to the survival and restoration of the society to health.[264] Jones fuses this wound metaphor with the Arthurian and Fisher King trope. Amidst the wasteland and the ruins of a shattered civilisation the gatekeeper of culture stands waiting for the questing knight to ask his question.[265]

*The Anathemata* can be viewed as an archive in which the *anathemata* or sacred things from Britain's rich and long history are collected and preserved. Jones's duty is:

> To conserve, to develop, to bring together, to make significant for the present what the past holds, without dilution or any deleting, but rather by understanding and transubstantiating the material, this is the function of genuine myth, neither pedantic nor popularizing, not indifferent to scholarship, nor antiquarian, but saying always: 'of these thou has given me have I lost none'.[266]

Jones's will to gather in and store captures the encyclopaedic quality of *The Anathemata* as it draws on a vast array of knowledge and interests from geology to sailing. In some ways, he is attempting to do for his areas of Wales and London what Joyce, the ur-encyclopaedist

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[263] Jones, *The Anathemata*, p. 35.

[264] The wound motif is also important in *Omeros*, though the poison is history and the cure is escape through art. In opposite ways, each author uses epic to describe and myth to facilitate this healing.

[265] In the middle of the Second World War, Jones turns to myth to evoke the situation, but rationalises it at the same time:

> Because the Land is Waste (or seems so to the writer) it seeks to do what the hero in the myth was rebuked for not doing, i.e. it seeks to 'ask the Question'. Although, alas, unlike the myth, it does not suppose that in asking the question the land can be 'restored'. Although if all the world asked the question perhaps there might be some fructification – or some 'sea-change'.

Jones, 'Art in Relation to War', p. 123.

[266] Jones, 'Myth of Arthur', p. 243.

writer of the twentieth century, did for Dublin: to capture through the singular and particular complexity of life in a place an entire history and culture, phenomenological and universal. *The Anathemata*'s modernist form and the context of its writing, suggests another potential lens through which to view the text as archive: as a counter-epic or archival epic.

As repository of knowledge constructed in a time of total war, *The Anathemata* has affinities with what Paul K. Saint-Amour has described as a 'particular genre of interwar modernist work that constitutes […] a counter-discourse to that of total war'.[267] Total war 'indexes modern warfare's putative expansion beyond the battlefield to encompass a nation's every political, economic, and cultural domain'.[268] Saint-Amour's characterisation of the interwar period as a 'tense future' describes the phenomenon of the effect of total war which creates a 'collective psychosis' characterised by a 'highly automated ritual of anticipation, dread, and mass traumatisation'.[269] Not having fully assimilated the violence of the Great War, the trauma repeats, but intensifies with the constant fear and almost fatalistic anticipation of another war.[270] When 'total war' arrives in the 1940s it targets all society as it is aimed at the physical and psychological civilian life in urban zones. Impending destruction has terrible psychological effects. It threatens complete annihilation. War is no longer fought heroically in distant lands. The front is re-located in the cityscape as war is brought into the sphere of daily domestic life.[271]

As a response, Saint-Amour claims, modern writers turn to the encyclopaedia form in order to protect and preserve all that was threatened by impending destruction.[272] They require a 'total-text'.[273] Interestingly, Hart Crane was well aware of this, but bemoaned his education and indisposition towards critique:

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[267] Paul K. Saint-Amour, *Tense Future: Modernism, Total War, Encyclopedic Form* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), p. 9. His argument extends beyond the inter-war period to the effects of nuclear war on fiction.
[268] Saint-Amour, p. 7.
[269] Saint-Amour, p. 6. Saint-Amour draws on the writings of Lewis Mumford who Jones is most likely to have read.
[270] Saint-Amour, pp. 13-18.
[271] Jones's portrayal of London during the Blitz in his work, 'Female Warden during the Blitz, 1941' exemplifies this idea in a variety of complex ways. *The Art of David Jones: Vision and Memory*, ed. by Ariane Bankes and Paul Hills, (Farnham: Lund Humphries, 2015), p. 130.
[272] The seminal analysis of this type of fiction is Edward Mendelson, 'Encyclopedic Narrative, From Dante to Pynchon', *Modern Language Notes*, 91 (1976), pp. 1267-1275. The essay would seem to contradict any comparison between encyclopaedic form and Jones's work.
[273] Saint-Amour might reject this term, as he has a nuanced view of totality in the forms he discusses as they resist the notion so strongly, and posits a 'counter-totalizing work' that 'avows the partiality of its totality claims without renouncing them, taking up totalization under the sign of its impossibility'. Saint-Amour, p. 10. Properly considered, Jones is able to embrace the fragmentary, since his poetics is predicated on an

> Beginning with Spengler and Wells, this age seems to [be] typically encyclopedic. This may assist the artist in time – by erecting some kind of logos, or system of contact between the insulated departments of highly specialized knowledge and enquiry which characterize the time – God knows, some kind of substantial synthesis of opinion is needed before I can feel confident in writing about anything but my shoestrings. … These Godless days! I wonder if you suffer as much as I do. At least you [Waldo Frank] have the education and training to hold the scalpel.[274]

Saint-Amour points to the genesis of the encyclopaedia in the enlightenment project of Diderot to 'collect all the knowledge that now lies scattered over the face of the earth, to make known its general structure to the men among whom we live, and to transmit it to those who come after us'.[275] The encyclopaedia, at least as Saint-Amour argues in the way that Diderot conceived of it, was constructed and predicated on the need and desire for continuity, perpetuity and universal knowledge, all the while asserting its own fallibility, 'caveats, monstrosities and incongruities'.[276] In this regard, the encyclopaedia provided a model form capacious enough to accommodate the variety and complexity of modern life with the premise and ambition for lasting posterity. These 'monumental works' sought 'to archive a city, national culture, historical moment, or worldview against the eventuality of its erasure'.[277]

Saint-Amour's argument unfairly pits the encyclopaedic form against the 'bellicose holism of epic'.[278] He characterises epic, conventionally enough, as a genre which 'presupposes its own unbroken transmissibility and cannot truly imagine the disaster of its protagonist culture'.[279] Since it is so 'confident of its adequacy to the task of total representation, epic conceives of its knowledge world as fully mapped and integrated so it transmits knowledge as a given along vectors of unbroken continuity and community'.[280] As

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incarnational theology which does not renounce the singular nor assume the total transcendent into the absolute.

[274] Crane, *O My Land, My Friends*, p. 369.
[275] Saint-Amour, p. 198.
[276] Saint-Amour, p. 188.
[277] Saint-Amour, p. 9, p. 182.
[278] Saint-Amour, p. 185.
[279] Saint-Amour, p. 189.
[280] Saint-Amour, p. 189.

I have argued in the introduction, the epic is a much more malleable and complex form which contains its own counter-narratives, but the distinction and introduction of the encyclopaedia form is useful, if not to provide an analogous model, then certainly to reconfigure the understanding of the formal problems of scale, heterogeneous content and systematic ordering principles with which Jones struggles as he attempts to gather in the fragments to house and organise against the total military forms of domination.

While, *The Anathemata* reveals the cultural and spiritual necessity for the archive and explores it in the fragmentary narrative form, Jones is able to unify the particulars through his theological vision. His is not a secular product of Enlightenment rationality and systematising. A general footnote to the 'Rite and Foretime' section, which was heavily laden with information, findings and knowledge from other discourses such as science, geology, anthropology and archaeology makes this clear. Jones knew very well that the source of his knowledge was 'mutable' and hypothetical, likely to be proved, disproved or altered with the 'fresh evidence or with fresh interpretation of the same evidence'.[281] And while Jones refused to undermine these discourses, unlike postmodern radical aesthetics, he reserves the right as poet of Catholic faith, to transform and use these materials 'to express a permanent mythus'.[282] Just as many epic poets included the facts of history liberally according to their own 'mythus', so too does Jones employ and transform an encyclopaedic form in service of his artistic and religious vision.

Not only is the text a complex and multivalent signifying archival system pointing at once to itself as a sign, or collection of signs, it also refers to its locality in time as a sacred, but fragile, space vital for the protection of the signs. Throughout his work, Jones makes the connection between language and texts, history and geography explicit as he explores and tries to preserve,

> the perilously balanced linguistic situation, […] the whole tie-up of very ancient duration with site locality, whereby terrain and nomenclature and the web of history are so intermixed as to be hardly patient of separation, even in the mind.[283]

[281] Jones, *In Anathemata*, p. 82.
[282] Jones, *In Anathemata*, p. 82.
[283] David Jones, 'A London Artist Looks at Wales', *Dying Gaul*, pp. 35-40 (pp. 38-39).

Jones combines archival space with textual archaeological site and sanctifies it. Jones's interest in tumuli, ruins and remains transforms the text into an archaeological site and extensive heritage monument. Jones laments the 'placeless cosmopolis' and seeks to make tangible the fragile Welsh landscape and culture described as 'an actual topography, being commemorative, becomes inviolate, like a shrine'.[284] The idea of transformation and metamorphosis is captured in the theological term 'transubstantiating' and given literary and geological inflection.[285] Jones describes the coincidence of place and time in the local. Even beset by gaps, he follows his material in a downward and in a continuous seam:

> The adaptations, the fusions
> the transmogrifications
> but always
> the inward continuities
> of the site
> of the place.[286]

*The Anathemata* as a poem in process reveals the ongoing method of poetic activity as an archaeological form of discovery and self-consciously intimates its own developments of finding, organising and interpretation of materials according to its own particular organising principles and historical vision. It is both a collection and provides a hermeneutic or tool for curating. Therefore, the poem foregrounds the textual nature of the ordering and creation and interpretation of this material necessary to transform it into a meaningful archival-archaeological form.

This places Jones in line with the archaeological aesthetics of modernist and late modernist poetics. Bloomfield argues that the method which she terms 'archaeopoetics' describes the archaeological method of poetic inscription of history is encapsulated by Walter Benjamin,

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[284] Jones, 'A London Artist Looks at Wales', p. 39.
[285] Jones, 'Myth of Arthur', p. 243.
[286] Jones, *The Anathemata*, p. 90.

> He who seeks to approach his own buried past must conduct himself like a man digging. Above all, he must not be afraid to return again and again to the same matter; to scatter it as one scatters earth, to turn it over as one turns over soil. For the 'matter itself' is no more than the strata which yield their long-sought secrets only to the most meticulous investigation. That is to say, they yield those images that, severed from all earlier associations, reside as treasures in the sober rooms of our later insights.[287]

The archaeopoetic method seeks images and signs from the 'marginal and archaic' remnants of the past in a process of excavation and recovery.[288] In doing so, Bloomfield, argues that the method reconstructs an alternative and revisionist historical pattern which is part of a search for a 'non-developmental, non-narrative mode of historical understanding' and a poetic re-visioning of history.[289] Archaeopoetics implies an archeaocritique. Elaborating on Benjamin's work, Bloomfield suggests that the materiality of the image, the technique of literary montage and the notion of the illumination or flash of the dialectical image all serve to illuminate the past in a material and 'palpable, physical encounter embodied in the qualities of the visual image as an alternative to a mode of historical knowledge dominated by the conceptual abstractions of discursive logic'.

This argument is illuminating in the understanding of Jones's archival and archaeological method which interlaces word and image, seeks to portray the depths of hidden historical material in a poetic form which is spatialized, but also like the archaeological dig cordoned off, marked and demarcated as sacred and valuable. This is part of a critique of modernity and a struggle against it. Bloomfield quotes Susan Howe to describe the process of writing history: 'to write history is to cite history' and to '"to transplant words onto paper with soil sticking to their roots"'.[290] Jones will perform a very similar process of 'citation, collage, and a foregrounding of the physicality of historical traces, especially in the process of their decontextualization and recontextualization'.[291] But

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[287] Walter Benjamin, 'Excavation and Memory', qtd. in Mandy Bloomfield, *Archaeopoetics: Word, Image, History* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2016), p. 18. This book which explores Charles Olson and other contemporary poets has much to offer an analysis of David Jones.
[288] Bloomfield, p. 15.
[289] Bloomfield, p. 16.
[290] Bloomfield, p. 19.
[291] Bloomfield, p. 19.

for Jones this archaeopoetic method is to serve his theory of culture which foregrounds man as artist and curator and his theology of history in which the remnants are given final order and meaning.

However, this quest and vocation places an incredible burden upon Jones and the apparatus of the poem. Several inherent interpretative and situational problems are present in the working of the text. The first is a contradiction of sorts: no longer simply a personal, accidental and specific 'insular' account, he gives himself the immense task of gathering in everything. Ironically fearing erasure of history, what Jones also suffers from is an excess of it. The depth of the field and its convolutions and contortions of geological and historical changes are manifold and complicated. The impulse to collect and sort material findings is potentially limitless, but the means and structure of storing and making must necessarily be limiting and containing. The connections to be made concerning any of the objects or anathemata is dizzying. The correspondences also threaten to obscure the very particularity and individuality of the thing itself. (The portrait of the genuflecting woman is a case in point.)

Furthermore, the problem of indeterminacy is exacerbated by problems of interpretation. Reading the archive and ruins is a process beset by problematic erasures, inscrutability and enigmas. The past is always in some senses unknowable. Relics and remnants mean different things and are inscrutable as their meaning decays and is altered by time. As a result Jones will often find himself lost without temporal markers or even spatial coordinates, trying to connect and collate and find meaning. The question and interrogative mode is one of the most persistent features of the poem. Whilst sometimes the questions are rhetorical as a way of trying to re-imagine past experience and to see and to discover anew, in other instances they are signs of wonder and awe as the poet, '[a]nticipating the reader's ignorance' acts a 'pedagogue, including material in the question, asking and answering, stimulating and satisfying all at once'.[292] But the question is just as often an expression of underlying bewilderment and disorientation. Jones often attempts to locate and secure temporal and spatial certainty only to find himself (and the reader) submerged under layers of interconnections and facts and data. For Jones, security of place is to be located in the past, but the past presents a multiplicity of different analogous

[292] Sherry, 'Critical Models', p. 147.

locations and interconnections; time is marked by the present moment, but equally, it is connected and only given meaning by other moments or instances in history, and ultimately by the events of the Paschal Mystery. William Penny's post-structuralist reading points out that, 'instability with regards to signifiers appears at odds with the apodictic certainties of the Eucharist and other sacred imagery the poet employs'.[293]

Finally, the tension between *The Anathemata*'s epic aims to present the totality or the 'anatomy of western culture from its prehistoric beginnings to the present'[294] and the very modernity which threatens to destroy the archive and reduce it to rubble is intensified formidably by the Second World War. The immediate context of the 'architectural fragmentation of London and the political fragmentation of Europe' forces us to consider the poem as a 'measured response' to the war.[295] The war is referred to 'indirectly' only once and in parentheses as a fratricidal conflict in the apocalyptic end of civilisation:

> (O Balin O Balan!
> how blood you both
> the Brudersee
> toward the last phase
> of our dear West.)[296]

For Mellors, 'the iconography of war continues to make its presence felt' even if 'any direct reference to the contemporary situation is muted, complex and shielded'.[297] As if protecting himself within the debris and amidst the ruins, Jones salvages and shelters himself in a falling capital within his archive. However, both wars 'dimmed to near obscurity, and veiled through layers of abstraction', are still haunting presences.[298] Jones's epic project then is conditioned by two impulses or contradictory aims and as such the text is marked by both the desire for form to transcend the nightmare of history and the fragmented debris of the

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[293] William Kevin Penny, 'Materia Poetica: Reading David Jones's "The Anathemata" as a Sacred Palimpsest', *Religion & Literature*, 45.3 (Autumn 2013), pp. 115-132 (p. 122).
[294] Dilworth, *Shape of Meaning*, 152.
[295] Corcoran, p. 40, p. 33.
[296] Jones, *The Anathemata*, p. 115.
[297] Mellors, p. 150.
[298] Mellors, p. 150.

very history Jones found himself bunkered in.[299] Putting the conflict into a wider critique of modernity, Jones writes in 1942-1943:

> […] here and now we are considering more the effect of large scale war upon city-civilizations in the later stages of their development, and here we can speak with intimacy and understanding, and not without feeling. Many of us had direct participation in one large-scale war inflicted on just such a civilization, and now all of us, in varying intensity, are experiencing the infliction of another and larger war upon that same civilization grown a little more complex, far more disillusioned, more highly organized, more megalopolitan, more neurotic. We need not speak theoretically, but experientially, not as students of history or exponents of past cultures, but as persons who have seen with our own eyes and felt with our own bowels.[300]

A closer analysis of the opening of *The Anathemata* and other selected passages is essential to illustrate these multiple aspects of textual, archaeological modes in the context of civilizational crisis. After its fairy-folk epigram in which history is fabularised and rendered circular, *The Anathemata* begins, in a dilapidated church at the moment of Consecration. Just as the time is specific yet civilizational, the place is literal and textual: we are located 'at the sagging end and chapter's close'.[301] Since *The Anathemata* is 'haunted by a specific traumatic past of war',[302] the scene is also a haunted place caught between two traumas. Read as a symptom of traumatic violence the presence of the past uncannily shadows the scene and is also repeated in the actual events of the second war. The Great War returns in the description of the language of trench warfare and the scene is literally in the midst of London under a firestorm. The church is boarded up, threatened by the encroaching 'utile inflitration'.[303] Ghosting this description is the blighted and petrified landscape of the trenches: the columns are '[o]ssfic, trussed with ferric rods' and the statues and icons, who

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[299] Jones frequently referred to his rooms as his dugout. See Mellors, p. 147.
[300] Jones, 'Art in Relation to War', p. 127.
[301] Jones, *The Anathemata*, p. 49.
[302] Leo Mellors, *Reading the Ruins: Modernism, Bombsites and British Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), p. 147.
[303] Jones, *The Anathemata*, p. 50.

have seen the carnage before, 'nod recognition across the cramped repeats of their dead selves'.[304] The priests and his altar servers are 'rear-guard details' who are in a terrible military and cultural fix.[305] Yet, dutifully pre-Vatican II, they are facing away from the congregation (or what little remains of them) and as such they are 'heedless of the incongruity, unconscious that the flanks are turned and all connecting files with drawn or liquidated'.[306]

Subtly running through the opening is also the meta-language of sign making and collecting or archiving. Puns and the semiotic codes suggest the textuality of the space as book, archive and archaeological site to be read: 'signs', 'syntax', chapters, 'files', 'symbols', 'name-bearing instruments', 'tokens', 'matrices', 'institutes'.[307] The scene is an intertextual space of allusions to other texts, most prominently 'The Waste Land', and by implication in 'Pellam's land', Grail Legend. As we have seen the priest is an amalgam of types: he is a cult-man and ritual figure, and he is also guardian and collector in a domestic archive paying respect to and lovingly tending the 'venerated trinkets'.[308] The priest is already engaged in making shapes and in the process of lifting up and sanctifying an efficacious sign. His 'groping syntax' finds form. Presiding of the entire book, he will be the archetypal priest, curator and artist recalling and re-representing form, the authority figure through whose liturgical and Sacramental structure the meaning of the text and the objects within it are given order, preserved and celebrated. He is able to, 'ADSCIPTAM, RATAM, RATIONABILEM' – that is ascribe and find sources, codify and authenticate, and rationally collate and organise materials.[309]

The priest is also the model reader and interpreter of the signs. Later in the poem, in 'Mabinog's Liturgy', extremely close attention is paid to the priest's ceremonial and ritualised reading of the liturgy in a sensual and physical mode:

> But first, careful that his right thumb is touching the letters
> of the writing, he must make the sign, down and across,

[304] Jones, *The Anathemata*, p. 49.
[305] Jones, *The Anathemata*, p. 50.
[306] Jones, *The Anathemata*, p. 50.
[307] Jones, *The Anathemata*, p. 50.
[308] Jones, *The Anathemata*, p. 50.
[309] Jones, *The Anathemata*, p. 50.

beginning where the imposed, preclear-bright uncial reads,
*Exiit edictum a Caesare Augusto*.
Just where, in a goodish light, you can figure-out the ghost-
capitals of indelible eclogarii, rectilineal, dressed by the left,
like veteran of the Second, come again to show us how,
from far side shadowy Acheron and read
IAM REDIT . . . VIRGO
. . . IAM REGNAT APOLLO[310]

As if to suggest the means of appreciation of his own work, he inserts on the opposite page one of his inscriptions. It asserts the materiality of the form and actualises the content of the poem overleaf. It embodies Jones's incarnational poetics in which artefacts are both material and spiritual signs pointing to the 'simultaneous presentation of the gospel word as timebound material and as timeless universal sign, elaborated by the human artist'.[311] In the actual passage Jones provides a clue to his intertextual and formal mode of reading and construction. The way of reading is tactile and ritualised. It is also 'architectonic'[312] as it proceeds in a cruciform interlace and chiasmus of directions. The movements of hand and eye hint at the two modes of readings: the typological and archaeological mode, downwards, and in the analogical mode of interpretation to other connections, across. The reference to light is both physical and spiritual. It illuminates the past and intimately connects the reading to the origin of the sign making and chiselling of the uncials. Significantly the act of reading is a material detective work of reading inscriptions which on the palimpsest remain indelible below. They are traces which return in the act of reading as fulfilment of prophesy. Making the sign recalls the prophecy of Christ's birth by Virgil and establishes a *nekuia* of sorts, a communication with the dead. Jones is quite specific in his footnote about the source of inspiration for the passage. He had,

[310] Jones, *The Anathemata*, p. 219.
[311] Staudt, *Turn of a Civilization*, p. 75.
[312] Corcoran, p. 44.

> especially in mind a palimpsest in which the large letters of Cicero's *De Republica* are still plainly visible beneath the smaller, fluent, cleat unicals of St. Augustine's Commentary on the Psalms, owing to ineffective erasion.[313]

This type of analogical and typological reading is an act of excavation and recovery of traces of meanings in a mode which would directly contradict a secular and rational historicism. Jones achieves his sacramental reading through the action of the priest and the symbolism of the sign of the cross which provides the logic and connections between the texts, sanctifying and authorising them. This type of reading elides and subsumes the indeterminacy of the gaps, the ellipses and the potential multiplicity of meaning into a non-historical code or eschatology of events, sign and meaning. Penny senses the tension and suggests that the reference to the 'erased text' points to the 'irreducibly plural' and 'endless play of signification' is 'directed and rehabilitated by' Jones's 'positing a third and irreducibly plural layer where meaning is made manifest and whose graphic import engenders its own chain of signification'.[314] However, I think that the conflict between the two readings, one deconstructive and sceptical of origins and presence, and the other with a belief in the presence of an order of sacred embodied signs is in fact irreconcilable.

Elsewhere we see Jones performing the same reading of landscape in terms of an archaeopoetical method and his particular sacramental, and in this particular instance, incarnational theology of history and language. There are common links between Bloomfield's reading of Olson, who she argues, has a 'sense of history' which is 'tied to a phenomenological experience of site, and geographical and culturally specific space'.[315] In a similar way to Jones's work, Olson's poem becomes an 'open field' 'that performs perceptual engagements with historical materials' in ways that 'transform the page into an archaeological site'.[316] Perhaps less typographically adventurous and scrambled than Olson's work, Jones arranges his texts and lines in layers and strata in what Corcoran terms a 'metamorphic form'.[317] That such a form is integral to Jones's poem is a result of his fascination with the geological history of Britain, which in turn reflects his poetic use of

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[313] Jones, *The Anathemata*, p. 218, n. 4.
[314] Penny, p. 125.
[315] Bloomfield, p. 26.
[316] Bloomfield, p. 26.
[317] Corcoran, p. 79.

scientific and technical language descriptively and metaphorically to evoke a history of culture inscribed geographically.[318] Jones's poetry is a form of language under pressure and is characterised by a dense sedimented style which re-presents the various natural and geological forces in shaping the landscape and rivers in the very material form of the text. Significantly, though Jones impacts layers of meaning within the activity of the formation of the mountains, rivers and valleys. This is not an alien process of nature resistant to human culture, but a metaphorphosed form of nature with human signs and myth embedded within its very energy and action:

> Across the watersphere
> Over the atmosphere, preventing the crystal formations
> Ambient grew the wondrous New Cold:
> Trauma and thauma, both.
> This is how Cronos reads the rubric, *frangit per medium*, when
> he breaks his ice like morsels, for the therapy and fertility
> of the land-masses.
> […]
> from Eden-dales, or torn from the becked fells
> transmontane
> transmarine
> the barrier-making floods-gravels
> the drumlined clays and the till-drift
> had bye-wayed and delta'd the mainway
> for Tanat and Vyrnwy.[319]

Aesthetically, the passage presents the jagged and fractured formation of rivers through enjambment and emphasises the process with the physicality of the language in which nouns and verbs are compounded into one another. There is never a sense of randomness to this action because in Jones's view the process is to be read to show the purpose of creation where everything in 'Fore-time' is a prototype for the Christian narrative:

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[318] See Miles, *Backgrounds*, pp. 97-109.

[319] Jones, *The Anathemata*, p. 69. For a detailed exposition of this facet of Jones's work see: Andrew Campbell, 'Strata and Bedrock in David Jones's *Anathémata*', *Renascence*, 46.2 (Winter 1994), pp. 117-131.

From before all time
the New Light beams for them
And with eternal clarities
*Infulsit* and athwart
the fore-times.[320]

Jones renders the continental breaking of icy landmasses as a geological analogy of the breaking of the bread. The breaking of the ice is both a trauma, but read in Christological terms it is a wonder too, just as the tearing of Eden will ultimately be redeemed in Christ's sacrifice.

Jones's metamorphic form is also employed in the portrayal of landscape as densely fused with the history of encounters between cultures and inscribed by the linguistic diversity of names of places. An evocation of a hill becomes layered in names and references to previous cultural deposits and other hills located elsewhere at other times. In the downwards mining of the hill as text Jones uncovers the resistant names and inscriptions of the past. He commented that he found it boring to engrave in English. It was the strangeness and the otherness of Latin and Welsh which tangibly evoked the past. In the same way, the names obscure and opaque to many readers, are deposited within the gaps and words. They are all connected, or compacted into a singular but diverse seam. However, they are transformed and brought into conjunction through the form-making of the archetypal high-room/hill of the Last Supper and the Crucifixion:

In the prepared high room
he implements inside time and late in time under forms in-
delibly marked by locale and incidence, deliberations made
out of time, before oreogenesis

on this hill

[…]

[320] Jones, *The Anathemata*, p. 73.

And where:

West horse-hills?
Volcae-remnants' crag-*carneddau*?
Moel of the Mothers?
the many *colles Arthuri*?

All the efficacious aslyms
*in Wallia vel in Marchia Walliae*,
*Ogofau* of, that cavern for
Cronos, Owain, Arthur.
*Terra Walliae!*
Buarth Meibion Arthur!
Enclosure of the Children of Troy![321]

The layering is not just rural and located in the countryside of Wales. To conclude this section and sum up Jones's archaeopoetic method, I would like to return to the immediate setting of the poem, London in the mid-1940s. Many critics have rightly noted that Wales is the space to which Jones turns to preserve the cultural myth and *materia poetica* of the past as opposed to the forces of modernity and empire.[322] However, London remained Jones's place of birth and he returned to it throughout his life despite responding to the social, industrial and technological transformation with regret and dismay. The Brockley of Jones's childhood, characterised by elm tree lined and unpaved streets with nearby open fields and hills, was an almost idyllic nostalgic place of 'unique magic […] a zone of metamorphosis'.[323] From 1910 the place of his youth would dramatically change as a result of extensive house building and transport development of electric tramlines. There is a sense that the nostalgia for the rural and the wild which germinated here would be later grafted onto his imaginative experience of Wales. It certainly informs his later poems in *The Sleeping Lord* which are dominated by the pre-modern mythic world of wooded legend,

[321] Jones, *The Anathemata*, p. 55.
[322] See Paul Robichaud, pp. 47-99.
[323] Thomas Dilworth, 'Place in the Poetry and Life of David Jones', *Locations of Literary Modernism: Region and Nation in British and American Modernist Poetry*, ed. by Alex Davis and Lee M. Jenkins (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 67-89 (p. 71).

borderlands and sacred burial sites. Jones's vision of London was archaeological in its layered exploration of imaginative depths, European/Imperial, mythic and epic in its connective scope, and artisanal and religious in its signifying form. Jones's poetic task was an excavation and recovery of the sacramental, gratuitous and extra-utile artefacts and fragmented remnants of the past beneath the everyday surface of a modern and often disenchanted metropolitan space.

However, it would be erroneous to overstate and to idealise the semi-pastoral London of Jones's youth. In fact, one must be cognisant, as indeed Jones was, of London's role as capital of an extensive colonial Empire[324] in an international world system and a powerful centre of political, economic and cultural relations. Indeed, tracing his family lineage through his mother, Jones was proud of his maternal family which had for several generations been part of the Thames-side shipping and mercantile trade in the Pool of London and Rotherhithe area. His mother and maternal grandmother were sources of a rich oral tradition and both were a personal guide to the history and sites of London. Dilworth notes that Jones's extended family were "living relics of the era of the Crimean War, the digging of Brunel's Thames tunnel, and the Victorian heyday of the Pool of London".[325] Anecdotes about his maternal grandfather Ebeneezer Bradshaw, a skilled craftsman, shipwright, mast and block maker who owned a shop and yard on the river east of Cherry-Garden Stairs, form the basis of the section 'Redriff' in *The Anathemata*.

The most significant London section of the poem, 'The Lady of the Pool', is also rooted in personal family history and inspired in part by childhood conversations with his mother. 'The Lady of the Pool' is dominated by the dramatic monologue of a mother figure, a lavender seller, Elen Monica, in the late Middle Ages whose digressive narrative embodies the vast historical sweep of London including tales of its many invasions, sea journeys and settled history from pre-Roman to Victorian times. Elen Monica embodies the tutelary feminine spirit of London which is opposed to a masculine Imperial order. It is she, who in her meandering tale encompassing stories of past lovers, history, myth, sea yarns, theology,

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[324] Jones attributes his first memory around 1900 to the marvellous sight and sound of 'a troop of horses, moving to the *taratantara* of bugles' which he would later find out was a detachment of City Imperial Volunteers on a recruitment ride through the outer suburbs for the war in South Africa. David Jones, '*In illo tempore*', *Dying Gaul*, p. 19.

[325] Dilworth, 'Place in the Poetry', p. 77.

and liturgy, proclaims to a captain of a ship which has just docked, 'What's under works up'.[326]

The section begins with a tour of sacred sites and churches of London which juxtaposes London analogically with Rome. Jones is re-creating the origin myth of London as an outpost of empire, but also a place with pre-history, already inhabited by the East-Saxons with their own dialect and identity. In doing this Jones activates the mythical origins of London embedded in associations of the early settlement by the Trinobantian Britons. From this name he follows Geoffrey of Monmouth's etymological source of origin linking London to Troy, and hence legitimising London as an heir to Western Civilisation: through the alternate name Troy Novant. In another blithe dismissal of fact in favour of a myth of epic origins in a unified European cultural complex, Jones writes that this connection is:

> an integral part of a national mythological deposit, whereby through the Trojan, Brute, of the line of Aeneas, Venus and Jove, our tradition is linked with all that succession can be made to signify; and seeing what we owe to that, the myth proposed for our acceptance a truth more real than the historic facts alone discover.[327]

Furthermore, Elen Monica is directly connected by name to Helen of Troy, to the name for Rome, '*Flora Dea'*, and to Flavia Julia Helena, wife of Constantius Chlorus and mother of Constantine who has a tangled presence in Britain's legend. She is supposed to have been born in Britain, built the Wall of London and is variously related to Welsh kings. Jones, in awe of the web of associations, lauds her as almost 'Britannia herself', claiming that, 'not so often has one historic person gathered to herself such a diversity of significances'.[328] Perhaps this semantic excess of resonance and meaning could be tentatively called an archaeological sublime through which Jones digs up an order of signs which signify beyond utility to a mysterious origin and connection to a source culture.

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[326] Jones, *The Anathemata*, p. 164.

[327] Jones, *The Anathemata*, p. 124.

[328] Jones, *The Anathemata*, p. 124 n. 3, p. 131 n. 3.

Finally, Jones's syncretic archaeological method can be further revealed in his recovery of vestiges of pagan religious material beneath Christian temples. Part of the Modernist anthropological turn[329] which drew heavily from Frazer, Weston and Harrison, he appropriates these findings and weaves this synthesis of fertility myth, ritual and allusion into his fundamentally Catholic typological and eschatological system. As such he uncovers the layers of religious and ritual significance and history beneath London's many churches:

> At the Lady-at-Hill
> above Romeland's wharf-lanes
> at the Great Mother's newer *chapelle*
> at New Heva's Old Crepel.
> (Chthonic matres under the croft:
> springan a Maye's *Aves* to clerestories.
> Delphi in sub-crypt:
> luce flowers to steeple.)
> At Paul's
> and faiths under Paul
> where
> so Iuppiter me succour!
> they do garlarnd them with Roman roses and do have stitched
> on their zoomorphic apparels and vest 'em gay for Artmeis.

And of all the Churches named after Mary, Jones continues:

> In all the memorials
> of her buxom will
> (what brought us ransom, captain)
> as do renown our city.[330]

[329] See Marc Manganaro, *Myth, Rhetoric, and the Voice of Authority: A Critique of Frazer, Eliot, Frye, and Campbell* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992).
[330] Jones, *The Anathemata*, p. 127.

The inescapable incarnational nature of man is present throughout the varied rites performed through history. The presence of past ritual shines through and survives as it is retold by a feminine and maternal figure who embodies a living presence selling lavender and passing on an oral tradition. She is also typologically and analogically connected to Mary the Mother of God, and behind this is the Great Mother principle. Through this mythological and historical Baedeker Jones de-familiarises London and attempts to restore its past traditions in a complex living voice.

As a Catholic David Jones conceived this archaeological method in incarnational and sacramental terms, and it had cultural implications which values the idea of unity in diversity. The specific shines through and embodies the divine or universal. A concluding remark from Jones's appreciation of Joyce's portrayal of Dublin is instructive. Jones makes a connection between remembering the myth of London so that he can in some way resist it being transformed into a homogenised placeless cosmopolis. The artist, rooted in the particular, depends,

> upon a given locality for no man could have adhered with more absolute fidelity to a specific site, and the complex historic strata special to that site, to express a universal concept. It was from the particular that he made the general shine out. That is to say he was quintessentially 'incarnational'.[331]

Jones in portraying his collective myth of London attempts this incarnational anamnesis in a complex 'effectual' re-calling. London emerges from the ruins and decline of post-Imperial malaise as the maritime hub of industry, a place connected to Europe by myth, history and mapped sea-journeys. Rome becomes the analogue city. This is a means of critiquing twentieth century London in that Jones is attracted to and yet critical of empire: Rome represents an inherited culture, tradition and religion, but the Imperial order is to be resisted as it comes to stand for the decadent, levelling rule by a disenchanted generality. London, in Jones's *Anathemata*, with all its abundant particularity and tangled history comes to embody this ideal site. Expressing what Édouard Glissant would describe as the poetics of relation, Jones emphasises the particularity and multiplicity of London as place.

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[331] Jones, 'Notes on the 1930s', p. 46.

However, London and Rome may be considered antithetical, Wales provides the essential spiritual grounding in relation to London, and necessary to counteract the force of Rome. In a radio broadcast in 1953 about the Coronation, Jones – perhaps surprisingly, as he was anecdotally said to have spat on Edward I's tomb in Westminster as a boy[332] – sees in the Crown a rich pageantry of symbolism and sacramental activity part of a continuous tradition stretching back through British history. But it is in relation to Wales that Britain gets her strength, not as a figure of a soon to be dismantled empire. Wales suggests the nature of Britain's cultural past and identity as:

> a great confluity and dapple, things counter, pied, fragmented, twisted, lost: that is indeed the shape of things all over Britain, but Wales has her own double-dapple.[333]

National and cultural identity is not located in an exclusive 'root' or pure racial memory, but in an entangled cultural complex that expresses both the 'haecceity or this-ness' and the unity of a cultural conglomerate. If we are to understand 'the Monarchy of Britain' or London, or Europe, 'we must first grasp the nature of the several haecceities or this-ness of the several peoples of this island'.[334] A modern epic of relation is a tale of tribes. It is a song of a place under places, and an attempt to put the many voices of an age in relation to one another.

In the next chapter, I shift focus to the 'end of history' and back to the New World Order of a global neo-liberal empire now dominated by America to explore Derek Walcott's *Omeros* (1990). Again, a poet very different in background and personality, Derek Walcott, shares with David Jones the passionate love for the local site and place which are peripheral to the centres of power. Although in the post-colonial era the aspects of globalisation and late modernity are markedly different, Walcott, like Jones, resists empire and modernity

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[332] Cited in Keith Alldritt, *David Jones: Writer and Artist* (London: Constable, 2003), p. 10. I cannot affirm the veracity of this anecdote.

[333] David Jones, 'Wales and the Crown', *Epoch and Artist*, pp. 39-50 (p. 46). The influence of another Anglo-Welsh poet, Gerard Manley Hopkins is evident. For a comparative study of the sacramental art in these poets, and Australian, Les Murray, see: Stephen McInerney, *The Enclosure of an Open Mystery: Sacrament and Incarnation in the Writings of Gerard Manley Hopkins, David Jones and Les Murray* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2012). Martin Potter has written illuminatingly on the connections between the religious and cultural aspect of Jones's writing as a Catholic in Britain in his book: *British and Catholic?: National and Religious Identity in the Work of David Jones, Evelyn Waugh and Muriel Spark* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2013).

[334] Jones, 'Wales and the Crown', p. 46. For more on this in relation to modernism and technology see Erik Tonning, 'David Jones: Christian Modernism at the BBC', in *Broadcasting in the Modernist Era*, ed. by Matthew Feldman, Henry, Mead and Erik Tonning (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), pp. 113-134.

and finds in the epic the strength in survival and resilience despite defeat.[335] Jones foresaw and summoned the call for the resistance of fragile local cultures facing a global homogenising utile civilisation. Wales was the site or shrine of his cultural material. Jones's epic search is for roots and materials in a layered past, and he finds in Wales, not a 'root identity', but a complex entangled 'rhizomic' one. Both Jones and Walcott would agree on the nature of man as an artist as an ongoing quest, and in the most bitter moments of historical suffering and defeat, art and ritual are a means of tenuous continuity and expression of a spiritual nature. Both, to varying degrees of confidence, assert the role of the poet as a public rememberer.

As such David Jones's quest is downwards and backwards. Derek Walcott, who suffers from the paradoxical condition of the burden of too much historical trauma and the absence or lack of history, however, re-routes the epic trajectory by traversing and crossing and reversing the spatial and temporal boundaries of the Atlantic and Mediterranean. The past is present in movements back and forth, but Walcott resists the backwards look, risks the unhistorical, and even controversially suggests the forgetting of the past to celebrate the living moments of life.

Not particularly interested in America,[336] David Jones, nonetheless, saw in the American experience mixed hope for the future of the epic, and a vital response to the malaise into which he thought Europe after two wars had sunk. He writes presciently and sympathetically, and, I believe it deserves quoting at length. He is trying to weigh up the value of empire in that it is a source of cultural myth, and yet 'Virgil knew the cost of Empire; the cost in suffering' of imperial history':

> It is an idle question whether this change is a retrogression or an advance, for man does not determine these things, nor the temper of the world into which he is born. He can at best suffer the circumstances of his nativity and tradition. But there is

[335] The particular figure Jones saw that embodied this Celtic quality of noble defeat was the statue of the Dying Gaul from Pergamon. In it, Jones saw,

> a continuity of struggle and a continuity of loss. I could not recall hearing works celebrative of victory, but only of relelntless resisitece culmittaing in defeat. But from each defeat came the living embers to feed the fires of resistance yet to be'.

David Jones, '*In illo tempore*', *Dying Gaul*, p. 26

[336] There is a letter detailing his thoughts on *Huckleberry Finn* and Cecil Chesterton's *History of the United States*, in which he thinks about the early settler colonial culture of America, contrasting the pioneering spirit with the changes of the twentieth-century. See, Letter to Tom Burns, 28 June 1942, *Dai Greatcoat*, p. 121.

something that he does determine, which it is his nature to fulfil. Whether on pre-history hill-camp, or in city-state, or in medieval manor, or the world of primitive migrations or of imperial collapse, in Victorian security or in our own Neo-Georgian predicament, he can, must, and does, make a song about it. If not in praise of Clarissa's forehead, then in praise of the vallum successfully defended, if not of the successful resistance, then of the Waters of Babylon. In due time, there rises above the cotton-field whips a body of song of great poignance and of real inventive interest. Who would have guessed that in the African transportations to the American continent, the theme of Salvation, as conceived by certain Christian sects, would, by contact with something in the Negro genius, have given 'Evangelicalism' its intensest art-form, and given to the world a very remarkable folk expression of abiding interest – a true, poetic-metric expression? In some way or other these things, perhaps, may always be, unless the temporary triumph of those conditions which are dictated by the primacy of material values so enervates man, that his native inclinations are numbed at the roots.

[…]

We know that within our own time more and more communities of men have abandoned, or been deprived of, long-standing cultural ways of life. We have seen them released and emancipated from hard and ancient economies and rooted conditions, and we have seen them adopt, or be assimilated into, a very different rhythm of life. We have seen their large measure of disillusionment and have heard many causes blamed for this state of things and many remedies propounded. The truth is we do not know in what fashion a new synthesis will be effected, how the gains will be consolidated and the ills overcome – if either. We do not know what songs may yet be possible or what shape our myth will take, but it looks as though the wasteland before us is extensive; and it is certain that in our anabasis across it we shall have reason to keep in mind the tradition or our origins in both matter and spirit.[337]

[337] David Jones, 'The Myth of Arthur', *Epoch and Artist*, pp. 241-242.

It is to the costs and legacies of empire that I now turn in an analysis of the island archipelago poetics of Derek Walcott.

## Chapter Four: Walcott's *Omeros*: Intimate Crossings and the Cultural Poetics of New World Epic

In this chapter I show with reference to Derek Walcott's *Omeros* and relevant selections from his earlier poetry that the epic of negation has been transformed into an epic of relation. By this I mean the characteristics of epic which saw it denounced as inadequate to capture the spirit of an age, are revised, or, in fact, enabling to the creation of a new form of epic. In fact, using Glissant's ideas of an epic which faces the totality of the world as a possibility of relation and as an opportunity to sing of one's locality and weave multiple histories expressing the shock and awe of modernity, the epic is the form most suited to capturing the diversity and fragmentation of historical, social, cultural and aesthetic energies. I show that Walcott reconstructs the epic though several strategies. These include a celebration of natural beauty and landscape of his island of St. Lucia; a reversal and appropriation of colonial and imperial tropes as a means of re-writing negative and demeaning racialized dismissal of Caribbean history and culture; the writing of a self-reflexive and ethical epic sensitive to its own constructions and designs, and aware of the limitations of figuration and critical of the hubris of epic monumentality; and finally a portrayal through the various characters as individual citizens of the island and as epic bards immersed in an ordinary and everyday life, enduring and surviving the legacy of the past and the often difficult socio-economic and political crises of the present. The epic, far from being of the completed past, is a genre open to the possibilities of the future and attuned to the present.

In the first section, I outline the socio-economic, cultural and historical complexities of St. Lucian society, from which Walcott attempts to craft his epic. In the second section, I suggest the figures of Adam and Crusoe as a means to recuperate and heal divisions of history. In the third I turn to central images of the vase, quilt and swift, which in Walcott's 'shipwreck aesthetics' reforms and recreates fragments into a new epic whole.

## Derek Walcott and the New World Epic

*Quales est natura insulae?* What is the nature of the island?[1]

There is a poignant scene in the documentary, *Poetry is an Island*, which is useful in introducing Walcott's vision as a Caribbean poet, his intimate relationship with his home, and the problems and concerns of race, nation, culture and heritage, the social and economic conditions of Saint Lucia, the legacy of Empire, and the desire for an epic to extoll the beauty and complexity of his island in graceful and lyrical style. The scene sees an ageing Derek Walcott sitting on a deck chair on Rat Island, a small deserted island off the coast of Choc Bay in St. Lucia his birthplace (23 January 1930) and home.[2] Walcott sits contemplating the beauty of the view, the light and the gentle sounds of the sea, whilst he stares mesmerised back at the island and into the past, perhaps recalling his memories of family (mother 'Teacher Alix', the ghost-like presence of his father, 'Nature's gentleman',[3] Warwick who died only a year after Walcott and his twin brother Roderick were born); his personal achievements, and no doubt his failures and conflicts; and, his life on the island with fellow artists and friends. Or maybe he is preoccupied with the legacy and history of the island – home to indigenous Arawak and Carib tribes, who were brutally annihilated by colonising Spaniards, the island was the prized and fiercely contested trophy in wars between France and Britain. More recent contemporary history might shadow over his mind – as a former British colony St. Lucia, now an independent country and one nation amongst many in a new globalised century, floats as a small part of the intricate, diverse and complex 'litany of islands' and 'rosary of archipelagos'[4] in the Caribbean basin.

Walcott, reflective, faces inward and towards the island across the water. He is emblematic of the poet as outsider and yet part of community. Whilst he is often separate and solitary, the documentary also reveals Walcott very much at home. Still in love with the

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[1] Derek Walcott, 'Isla Incognita', in *Caribbean Literature and the Environment: Between Nature and Culture*, ed. by Elizabeth M. DeLoughrey, Renée K. Gosson and George B. Handley (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2005), pp. 51-57, (p. 52).

[2] *Poetry is an Island: Derek Walcott*, dir. by Ira Does (Ira Does Productions, Rebecca Roos Productions, 2016) [on DVD]

[3] Derek Walcott, *Omeros* (London: Faber and Faber), p. 166.

[4] Derek Walcott, 'A Sea-Chantey', *The Poetry of Derek Walcott 1948-2013*, Selected by Glyn Maxwell (London: Faber and Faber,2014), p. 49.

island and its landscape he expresses an easy graceful interaction with the community. In other scenes, he walks the streets and chats to fisherman, sellers in the market, idles in a café, and gets a haircut. He directs plays and productions. He hosts international poets and friends. But he also wanders alone. After setting up an easel on the riverside in the morning light Walcott paints.

In his introduction to his book on Walcott, Paul Breslin notes this double characteristic of Walcott which 'define[s] the polarities of Walcott's imagination'.[5] He is in one respect, described by his lifelong artist friend and fellow St. Lucian, Dunstan St. Omer, as an 'elemental man' who like Adam drew 'his strength from St. Lucian folk culture and landscape and from a direct connection to the natural world, unattentuated by the historical self-consciousness of metropolitan cultures'.[6] But he is also described by another friend as 'a lot more like the Earl of Oxford than Simple Will from Avon'.[7] Walcott in this mask is an international man of letters and society, a cosmopolitan and world poet connected, honoured in capitals throughout the globe. Walcott contains multitudes and at least one paradox: 'Where St. Omer sees an elemental man, intact through every change of circumstance, Montgomery sees a player of social roles, a many minded Ulysses'.[8]

For Walcott, who died on St. Patrick's Day, the 17th March 2017,[9] the Caribbean island of St. Lucia was a continual source of inspiration to which he devoted his long and successful artistic vocation. His career began from his early prodigious beginnings which

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[5] Paul Breslin, *Nobody's Nation: Reading Derek Walcott* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2001), p. 7.
[6] Breslin, *Nobody's Nation*, p. 7
[7] Breslin, *Nobody's Nation*, p. 8.
[8] Breslin, *Nobody's Nation*, p. 8.
[9] The day marks a sad passing and a meaningful coincidence especially given his warm and close friendship with fellow Laureate Seamus Heaney. Of course, the rich influence and intricate web of allusions and connections to Irish literature are profoundly significant to Walcott's creative work. His early play *The Sea at Dauphin* is a reworking of John Millington Synge's *Riders to the Sea*; he was a devoted reader of Yeats and Joyce was a great master for Walcott. The colonial and historical legacy of Ireland's history provided a source of inspiration and understanding for an analogous island history of the Caribbean. In an interview with Edward Hirsch in 1977 Walcott comments, 'The whole Irish influence was for me a very intimate one. […] I've always felt some kind of intimacy with the Irish poets because one realized that they were also colonials with the same kind of problems that existed in the Caribbean. They were the niggers of Britain. Now with all that, to have those astounding achievements of genius, whether by Joyce or Yeats or Beckett, illustrated that one could come out of a depressed, deprived, oppressed situation and be defiant and creative at the same time'. Derek Walcott, 'An Interview with Derek Walcott, Edward Hirsch (1977)', in *Conversations with Derek Walcott*, ed. William Baer (Jackson: University of Mississippi, 1996), p. 59. See Michael Malouf, *Transatlantic Solidarities: Irish Nationalism and Caribbean Poetics* (Charlottesville, VA, University of Virginia Press, 2009) and Maria McGarrity, *Washed by the Gulf Stream: The Historic and Geographic Relation of Irish and Caribbean Literature* (Newark, Del.: University of Delaware Press; Cranbury, N.J.: Associated University Presses, 2008)

culminated in a collection of poetry published in 1949-1960. He left St. Lucia to pursue a pioneering career as playwright-director and founder of Trinidad Theatre Workshop, noted for popular and ground-breaking plays including *Dream on Monkey Mountain*. After a period of extended travels and teaching posts in Europe and across North America, Walcott established a formidable poetic oeuvre in which one of the predominant preoccupations remained an 'extended praise-song (a genre characteristic of Africa), a rite celebrating the gift of that particular heritage' and dedicated to home.[10] This paean to the island and its archipelago was crowned by the publication of *Omeros* and duly rewarded with a Nobel Prize for 'a poetic oeuvre of great luminosity, sustained by a historical vision, the outcome of multicultural commitment'.[11] Established and settled more permanently in St. Lucia, Walcott continued to travel and lecture and publish poetry and plays, including *The Bounty* (1997), *Tieplolo's Hound* (2000), *The Prodigal* (2005), right until his last collection *White Egrets* (2010), and, finally the collaborative book with artist Peter Doig, *Morning, Paramin* (2016).

Interlinked with crossing and travels, migrations and diaspora, Walcott's abiding concern throughout his poetic and dramatic career has been to register the life and community of St. Lucia and to record its history, and, in expressing its landscape and weather to name, validate and dignify a place. Above all else Walcott's artistic task was to record and to capture the place and spirit and people of the island in all its abundant natural beauty of landscape, sea, animal and plant life, fused with the rhythms, light, colours and shades of daily existence, and ultimately to celebrate the island's cultural variety and historical complexity. This demanded a sensual and natural language. Walcott writes:

> I seek
> As climate seeks its style, to write
> Verse crisp as sand, clear as sunlight,
> Cold as the curled wave, ordinary

[10] Paula Burnett, *Derek Walcott: Politics and Poetics* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2000), p. 30.
[11] Nobel Prize in Literature 1992, Swedish Academy, 'Nobel Prize in Literature 1992 – Statement', (Nobel Media AB: Nobelprize.org. 2014), <http://www.nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/literature/laureates/1992/> [accessed 25th May 2017]

As a tumbler of island water.[12]

In his epic autobiographical poem or *Künstlerroman*, *Another Life*, which describes his passage and growth as a young boy and aspiring painter and then poet, Walcott recalls his enthusiastic zeal, when with life-long friend, and later Sir, Dunstan St. Omer were apprenticed to local artist Harold Simmons, he swore:

> that we would never leave the island
> until we had put down, in paint, in words,
> as palmists learn the network of a hand,
> all of its sunken, leaf-choked ravines,
> every neglected, self-pitying inlet
> muttering in brackish dialect, the ropes of mangroves
> from which old solider crabs slipped
> surrendering to slush,
> each ochre track seeking some hilltop and
> losing itself in an unfinished phrase,
> under sand shipyards where the burnt-out palms
> inverted the design of unrigged schooners,
> entering forests, boiling with life,
> *goyave*, *corrosol*, *bois-canot*, *sapotille*.[13]

Walcott reconfigures the artist as hero, displacing colonial tropes of conquest and mastery, into the labour of apprenticeship and devotion. His task is one of 'wonder' where his 'heart from its ribcage yelped like a pup' so that he might mark territory, settle, and make habitable his surroundings with easel and paint 'as firm | as conquerors who had discovered home'.[14] Walcott seeks to let the landscape speak in its own dialect and reveal its roiling energy and life in the ongoing and unfinished iteration of local names in its own 'brackish

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[12] Derek Walcott, 'Islands', in *The Poetry of Derek Walcott 1948-2013*, selected by Glyn Maxwell (London: Faber and Faber, 2014), p. 54.
[13] Derek Walcott, *Another Life: fully annotated* (Boulder, Co.: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2004), p. 52.
[14] Derek Walcott, *Another Life*, 8.II.1205, 1208, 1213-1215, p. 53.

dialect'.[15] The self-reflexive pun, referring to the palm as tree and the artists hand's life-lines, suggests rooted ancestry and rhizomic prophecy, reflects a 'magical faith in the power of art to embody the experienced world'.[16] Walcott evokes his poetic desire for immediacy of experience and a recognition of the powers of a naturalised craft of poetic creativity which is figured, as it would be in *Omeros*, as a vessel travelling out to sea:

> One worked to have the 'feel' of the island, bow, gunwales, and stern as jealously as the fisherman knew his boat, and despite the intimacy of its size, to be as free as a canoe out on the ocean.[17]

The relationship of the poet on the shore looking to the sea is in Walcott's mind extended beyond the size of the island and outward towards the open sea. Walcott 'paradoxically asserts topographic decorum on account of the epic scale of the omnipresent sea, against which the human figure is offset as heroic'.[18] Expressing an archipelagic experience which is integral to the form and content of his epic poem *Omeros*, Walcott emphasises the sea's 'immensity [which] creates awe' and, that as an island it fosters a sense of enlarged scale in space and time. Walcott describes it as epic:

> No matter how minor the Caribbean poet, in a sense he is an epic poet simply because of the scale of what surrounds him. If you live on a rock in Barbuda you are really in an immense ocean – an immense sea, actually, the Caribbean – and in an immense sky, and that vertical figure of the individual person is within large elements of physical feeling.[19]

Empowering and elevating the minor poet to the status of a wandering genius facing the tempestuous and immense sea, the idea of epic is rendered in the language of the sublime, which itself suggests the experience of terror and awe as muse. Walcott's idea of the poet,

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[15] Derek Walcott, Another Life, 8.II.1190, p. 52.
[16] Paul Breslin, *Nobody's Nation: Reading Derek Walcott* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2001), p. 169.
[17] Derek Walcott, 'What the Twilight Says', in *What the Twilight Says: Essays* (London: Faber and Faber, 1998), p. 14.
[18] Paula Burnett, *Derek Walcott: Politics and Poetics* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 2000), p. 39.
[19] Paula Burnett, *Derek Walcott: Politics and Poetics* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 2000), p. 39.

isolated, masculine, both aggrandised and belittled by immensity, corresponds to an aesthetic and philosophical view of the island-poet as a secluded and separate contemplative entity. This identification may take the form of self-determination and independent national identity or the peculiar resistance and unique individuality of culture and style. It may even promise the integrity of cultural and political unity. Walcott quotes William Cowper in order to assume a presence and authority of the sovereign poet:

> I am monarch of all I survey,
> My right there is none to dispute,
> From the centre all around to the sea,
> I am lord of the fowl and the brute.[20]

And yet the urge for singularity is only an aspect of island culture. Island and archipelago awareness enacts telescoping and variation in terms of both scale and temporality. Not just a unitary enclosed space of isolated remoteness, the island is always connected beneath to a submarine landmass, linked across the surface of the ocean to a chain of islands, and further immersed in an ocean which, with its complex fluid systems of currents and patterns alter, shape and influence the culture and history of the island. Like a palimpsest, the island has been written, rewritten, and created from multiple historical and ideological engagements through encounters, landings, crossings, departures, and returns. It encompasses a trans-historical and mythic reality: an imaginary archipelago.

If Walcott's epic task is partly insular and located, rooted in the landscape, it is also expansive, outward looking, facing the sea. It is dedicated to capturing the unique island place, whilst also caught up in gazing beyond to the hemispheric connections which bring ships sailing in and out of the harbour. The beach as the liminal zone marking the point of contact between land and sea is emblematic of the Caribbean experience and condition. The key trope is that of the crossing and a poetics of relation between multiple zones and spaces: across islands, sea routes, meridians, and hemispheres; negotiations between the personal and the collective; explorations of the fissures and joins between singularity and

[20] Derek Walcott, 'The Figure of Crusoe (1965)' in *Critical Perspectives on Derek Walcott*, ed. by Robert D. Hamner (Boulder: Lynne Reinner, 1996), pp. 33-40, p. 37. Also in Derek Walcott, 'The Antilles: Fragments of Epic Memory', in What the Twilight Says: Essays (London: Faber and Faber, 1998), p. 80.

multiplicity; rootedness and travel or displacement; the emancipatory desire for home and sovereign possession of place and the fact of historical and current dispossession. These paradoxes highlight some of the dynamics of the West Indian island-poet:

> On small tropical islands the vistas are not of the place, but of the sea, tempting the eye away from the place. With such a history of migration and rootlessness, writers in that situation search for ways to belong to, and take possession of, the place where they are. What they begin with is dispossession, life in an empty house, in a place without history, in an artificially contrived landscape, where everyone is an alien.[21]

Seeing Walcott on the beach in this scene sends us searching back for echoes from his oeuvre which seek to express this fundamental condition. Here on the shore, the poet castaway, now king and patron of the island – it was leased as a gift from the St. Lucian government to honour the small country's second Nobel Prize winner – seems to embody his very own protean poetic figures and identifications, developed and evolved in a perpetual attempt to capture the experience of a 'West Indian intelligence'.[22] Walcott is the fortunate traveller; and, prodigal native son, with divided blood and fraught history, returning home from exile and wanderings to rest. Behind him in the forest, overgrown with creepers and lianas lies the ruins of a theatre, a bitter monument to a failed attempt to form a creative retreat colony for artists and writers. Like an ailing, patrician fisher-king near his neglected Chapel Perilous, Walcott, without much hope for renewal of a project which failed to secure sufficient government funding, stalks the amphitheatre and the stage hearing the echoes of past performances and dreams. And yet, Walcott has achieved the highest literary honour and written what has been considered by many as the most significant epic, *Omeros*, of the last decades of the twentieth century.[23]

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[21] Laurence A. Breiner, *An Introduction to West Indian Poetry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 204.

[22] Derek Walcott, 'Conversation with Robert D. Hamner (1975)', in *Conversations with Derek Walcott*, ed. William Baer (Jackson: University of Mississippi, 1996), p. 23.

[23] Oliver Taplin, being the most vociferous in his praise: 'Homeric epic may seem to have been dead over 250 years ago, in verse at least, in English at least. […] yet I am far from alone in feeling that a major new work of literature has appeared, one that will stand the test of time, of repeated rereading and rediscovery. See Oliver Taplin, 'Derek Walcott's Omeros and Derek Walcott's Homer', *Arion*, Third Series, 1.2 (Spring, 1991), pp. 213-

His New World epic is rooted in a landscape, sensitive to its histories, its tribes (past and present), deeply aware and respectful of the natural and ecological beauty of the island and the poet's special relation to it. A few of the figures or masks, as Walcott called them in Yeatsian vein, are particularly instructive in appreciating Walcott's quest for a rejuvenated New World Epic: Adam, Crusoe, and Odysseus. Together they form an interconnected composite series which is manifest in albeit altered and changed forms in the characters in *Omeros*: Philoctete is a wounded Adam-Christ figure; Achilles, a New World Adam, who as a fisherman has intimate and close knowledge of the sea and strives to find his name and identity whilst scraping a living and feeling the betrayal of his 'Eve', Helen;[24] Dennis Plunkett and his wife, Maud are Crusoe types who along with the narrator piece together the fragments of St. Lucian identities and lives and weave them into forms of inquiry, craft, and writing.

Fundamentally, however, Adam and Crusoe represent two polarities or modes of being intricately involved in the dynamics of an epic collective story. Adam is sensual, independent and immersed in a fresh experience of natural wonder and awe experiencing the New World with an immediacy and lyrical joy. He expresses the urge to wholeness and unity, and places faith in his poetic ability of renewal. Crusoe, a complex internalised colonial Other, whilst self-reliant and empowered in his singular freedom, is more isolated. Shipwrecked in an alien territory with only memory and fragments, and the debris and objects around him, Crusoe as humble craftsman must build a home and construct a sense of order. In Crusoe, Walcott reveals the schizoid and split legacy of colonial heritage and mixed traditions of St. Lucia as former British colony. Odysseus, an archetype which recurs throughout Walcott's poetry, is refracted through the figure of the narrator of *Omeros* and Seven Seas as a St. Lucian Homer. These 'Homeric' figures represent classical adaptations and transmogrifications of the Mediterranean and Caribbean transferred into protean faceted identities of a late twentieth century epic poet: the traveller, the migrant bard, searching for home through extended journeys across the globe.

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226. Certainly, Walcott's obituaries bear out the lasting legacy of the poem and are a testament to its singular achievement.

[24] I am keenly aware of the problematic implications of Walcott's sexual and gender politics with the appropriation and projection of images such as these onto women figures.

**Epic's ruins, ancestral houses, and verandas:**

An early poem, which exhibits an overly romantic and less assured or distinctive statement, nevertheless has the seed of a long-lasting vocational sentiment for the epic. Walcott writes,

> Perhaps I could build something from the broken language
> Of columns, splintered cups, the death of love
> And understand dead petals in the yard.[25]

In a Caribbean context this is intensified by the legacy of colonialism which has made castaways of everyone. For all the rhetoric of creating home and the optimism of expressing place, Walcott also speaks of the alienation and tension between the desire to be at home and the feeling of difference, whether that difference is marked in terms of race, class, religion, or any other of the fractures endemic to the Caribbean. This makes the writing of an epic all the more challenging. With the ongoing legacies of such systems of division and separation, the very idea of a homogenous tribe, the sanctity of the notion of a pure and essentialised identity, origin or traditional culture, indeed, the very idea of epic becomes impossible – at least in the form which is predicated on such values.

If Adam expresses the post-romantic possibility for epic in a new work of epical splendour and astonishment, and such promise of dwelling in a new home despite the ravages of history, then Crusoe, a darker and more sceptical mask, bears the burden and anxieties of destitution and separation from home, from the sources of comfort and familiarity. And whilst Walcott's mythopoeic reading of Crusoe does suggest a painfully necessary, but at least partially redemptive passage through suffering and loss to inner realisation for the castaway artist, there are more troubling and conflicted implications of the Crusoe mask. If the adamic strain in its mythic and spiritual guise promises ontological fullness in an experience of elation and delight, Crusoe threatens epistemological fracture and division, and an experience of despair.

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[25] Derek Walcott, 'The Pursuit of April – A Letter', qtd. in John Thieme, *Derek Walcott*, p. 28.

The figure of Crusoe brings into sharper relief an epistemological crisis of fragmented knowledge and broken traditions, exacerbated by the condition of colonial violence, contaminated authority and compromised literary sources. His job is the practical one of finding a language, negotiating between competing and contradictory traditions and rebuilding after the devastation of colonialism. Despite the resourcefulness of the castaway, the question remains: how can he piece together the debris of the past? In other words, the problem of the modern epic re-emerges in altered form and in a different context: how can a poet construct an epic with the profound lack of a secure, coherent foundational knowledge, with only traces and remains from the shipwreck of cultures, disorientated and lost in an environment that is strange and threatening, a place of continual erasure, hostility, and otherness? As with Adam this is a question of dwelling and of naming and celebrating, but the problem is deepened: with what tools? From what materials and from what remains?

In the postcolonial condition the question of the form and matter of epic is intensified and ramified: how does a subaltern narrate an epic? In what language and with what techniques and with what precedents? Whose histories must be included? Through what means is he or she able to assert the cultural authority to articulate and give voice to a previously disenfranchised people who remain silenced and marginalised? And, in a further 'ethical twist', to what extent can Walcott rightly claim the authority to represent St. Lucia and St. Lucians?[26] How does he resolve the questions of poetry in the face of socio-economic deprivation and poverty and the attendant political disillusionment which arises from repeated failures of governments to be able to solve these problems?

These broader questions can be filtered through the more specific problem at hand: given the appropriation and choice of literary masks to express a poetic identity: why should Walcott choose a white figure of dubious ideological lineage to be such an intimate mask? This is after all as I have mentioned the Crusoe who is part of a long genre of imperial adventure and travel stories implicated in the discourse of European myths of Otherness, exotic and savage islands of cannibals which inadvertently sought to legitimise and romanticise colonial conquest of virgin lands, populated only by primitives in need of the

[26] Victor Figueroa, *Not at Home in One's Home: Caribbean Self-fashioning in the Poetry of Luis Palés Matos, Aimé Césaire, and Derek Walcott* (Madison: Farleigh Dickinson University press, 2009), p. 31.

light of civilisation, religion, and economic and social development i.e. modernity. In less direct terms as Walcott has to some extent 'worked through' this conflict by the time of its writing and publication, in terms of *Omeros*, why does Walcott give such a close, sympathetic and compassionate portrayal of Plunkett, representative of British imperialism which itself was an increasingly impotent, disintegrating and fading force?[27] To what extent has the African heritage been assimilated?

More fundamentally, the question of how Walcott resolves or reconciles the imperial Crusoe with the hybrid Crusoe is related to the deeper more pressing concerns of his relationship with European traditions and culture, especially the language and literature of Empire and English. Walcott's use of Crusoe 'foregrounds the struggle to construct a tradition' and can exemplify his entire relationship with the literary canon.[28] Hence the epic tradition in which *Omeros* is perpetually, but not unqualifiedly, categorised. More broadly, and related to the question of *Omeros*'s contentious epic status, the use of Crusoe reflects a much deeper dynamic of engagement with tradition, whether classical or English: Walcott assimilates and subverts, uses and challenges, adopts and adapts. By neither taking a strikingly adversarial and reactionary stance towards Crusoe or a sycophantic assimilation of tradition, Walcott complicates the binary relationship of Master-Slave so integral to the authority of colonial relations, and, ironically, its revolutionary opponents who would jettison Eurocentric traditions only to become martyrs to revenge. His is an interdependent compound identity which seeks a fragile sense of relation between fractured aspects of the colonial situation; it means a composite figuration of Crusoe-Friday, or Adam-Crusoe, or Plunkett-Narrator. All of these figures are intimately and inextricably related and in *Omeros* are shown to be interconnected through intersecting lives and narrative lines.

Before illustrating Walcott's methods of recovery and recuperation in the constant struggles with the conflicts and tensions inherent in fractured and fractious heritages, it is necessary to consider some of the most important fault lines: race, empire and its legacy, class, education, and politics. In his exploration of all of these issues Walcott constantly shows them to be implicated in the very language, tropes and images available to the poet. As a consequence, it is implicated in his crafting of and negotiating with the epic tradition.

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[27] If we take Ian Strachan's critique of the gender politics in Walcott's work we see that this is a consistent representation of women. See

[28] John Thieme, *Derek Walcott*, p. 78.

However, they are also deeply personal and intimately related to Walcott's own family, his experiences and his poetic and dramatic vocation.

Race and the shadow cast by British imperialism are the most insidious and deeply pervasive divisions for Walcott. With white maternal and paternal grandparents, Walcott found himself frequently in an invidious in-between position. To capture this condition of multiple fractures and dissonances in his identity, Walcott represents himself variously as a divided child whose 'sign was Janus' and since he 'saw with twin heads' everything he says is 'contradicted',[29] schizophrenic, a bastard, and a nobody. He is, '[s]chizophrenic, wrenched by two styles'.[30] Walcott self-laceratingly describes his early 'imitative poetry' as expressing a 'yearning to be adopted, as the bastard longs for his father's household'.[31] With self-conscious ambivalence,[32] Walcott ambitiously sees himself 'legitimately prolonging the mighty line of Marlowe, of Milton' with an 'inheritance [which] was stronger because it came from estrangement'.[33] But, knowing that colonial literatures 'could never be considered its legitimate heir' and that entrance into the master's house is dependent on 'filial and tributary' qualifications, his 'voice sounded affected or too raw'.[34] In a classic case of the native's 'nervous condition'[35] and internalised complex of envy and repressed hatred,

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[29] Derek Walcott, *Another Life*, (21.III.3277-3279), p. 139. 'A Divided Child' is the title of the opening section of the autobiographical epic, *Another Life*. The description captures a subject caught between various dichotomies of painting and literature, religion and art. In particular, the direct reference sees Walcott justifying his aggrandisement of local life to an epic status, 'Provincialism loves the pseudo-epic' (7.I.952). Implicit in this observation is a complex retrospective narrative position which defends the child's perspective which would make heroes of the locals as they are observed and experienced 'at knee-height' (I.7.955). However, overlaid these observations is the realisation and admission of a parochial and distant upbringing in a colony which in fact re-affirms rather than further diminishes the grandeur of the local and rooted. It does, nevertheless, reveal a split, for the poet as adult is condemned to look to another life filtered through the objects and literatures of the metropole. Derek Walcott, *Another Life*, p. 41.

[30] Derek Walcott, 'Codicil', *Poetry of Derek Walcott*, p. 83. Walcott explicates this further in a review of a novel by Denis Williams where he writes:

> Schizoids, in a perverse way, have more personality than the 'normal' person, and it is this conflict of our racial psyche that by irritation and a sense of loss continues to create artists, most of whom have chosen exile. More than Ireland, even, we are deprived of what we cannot remember, or what, when we visit its origins, never existed the way we imagined, or where we remain strangers, contemptible cousins, the children of indentured servants and of slaves.

Derek Walcott, 'His is the Pivotal One About Race', in *The Journeyman Years: Occasional Prose 1957-1974, Volume 1: Culture: Society, Literature, and Art*, ed. by Gordon Collier (Amsterdam: Rodopoi, 2013), p. 284.

[31] Derek Walcott, 'What the Twilight Says', in *What the Twilight Says: Essays* (London: Faber and Faber, 1998), p. 27-28.

[32] Broadly I use this term in line with the seminal work of Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2004).

[33] Derek Walcott, 'What the Twilight Says', p. 28.

[34] Derek Walcott, 'What the Twilight Says', p. 28.

[35] This refers to Sartre's famous formulation in his introduction to Frantz Fanon's seminal text *The Wretched of the Earth*.

Walcott describes his 'tongue becoming burdened' and he suppresses feelings of bitterness only to project them outwards in 'aggression' and an 'egotism which can pass for genius'; he goes on to regret that this ambition, which served only to alienate him from his home and rail against it believing the 'heresy that landscape and history had failed him'.[36] Elsewhere in a celebrated early poem, faced with the brutality and injustices of colonialism in Kenya, which represents part of his ancestral home, he bemoans an impossible dilemma:

> I who am poisoned with the blood of both,
> Where shall I turn, divided to the vein?
> I who have cursed
> The drunken officer of British rule, how choose
> Between this Africa and the English tongue I love?
> Betray them both, to give back what they give?
> How can I face such slaughter and be cool?
> How can I turn from Africa?[37]

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[36] Derek Walcott, 'What the Twilight Says', p. 28. The psychopathic condition of the colonised subject, especially in terms his/her formation or interpellation through the racially coded education system, is most clearly and best described by Franz Fanon:

> The black schoolboy in the Antilles, who in his lessons is forever talking about 'our ancestors, the Gauls,' identifies himself with the explorer, the bringer of civilization, the white man who carries truth to savages – an all white truth. There is identification – that is, the young Negro subjectively adopts a white man's attitude. He invests the hero, who is white, with all his aggression – at that age closely linked to sacrificial dedication, a sacrificial dedication permeated with sadism. (Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, p. 114)

There is certainly truth to this, and Walcott is all too aware of the divisive nature of education which creates an elite class further adding to 'stratification between rich and poor black'. Derek Walcott, *CDW*, p. 39. Furthermore, he will readily acknowledge the indoctrination and glorification of Empire, especially in his reflections on his own schooling which results in a sense of dissatisfaction and internalised self-hatred coupled with a concomitant unsatisfiable desire to attain acceptance from the Coloniser/master. He recalls the litany of naming the great harbours of the world at the command of his school teacher: after all the rest, Castries is only 'a coaling station and der twenty-seventh best harba in der worl'!' (Walcott, *Another Life*, 5.I.695-696, p. 30). It is important, however, not to overstate this psychoanalytic interpretation. It is one that Walcott openly resists and criticises. Walcott repeatedly characterises his education in generally positive terms, and overall considers it at worst benign, and, at best inspiring. Perhaps this tone of obedient compliance, and yet a note of comic resistance, is evident in this response of the schoolboy who simultaneously responds dutifully in his list of famous, but affirms his subject position through his use of dialect and creole, and proudly asserts that, 'In eet the entire Breetesh Navy can be heeden!' in an albeit small reactionary act of subtle reversal of ownership and some pride and status (Walcott, *Another Life*, 5.I.695-696, p. 31). For more on the effects of colonial education see Derek Walcott, 'Interviewed by Melvyn Bragg', *South Bank Show*, ITV, 15 January 1989 < https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z67iA4QCF14>

[37] Derek Walcott, 'A Far Cry from Africa', *Poetry of Derek Walcott*, pp. 27-28.

As Jahan Ramazani points out this famous lyric 'elaborates the poem of ambivalence toward imperial and anti-imperial bloodshed'.[38] It also focuses the problem of colonial legacy on the dilemma of authentic expression and choice of language. He argues that 'thirty-four years later' in *Omeros* 'Walcott is still puzzling out what it means to love the English language yet hate English imperialism'.[39]

To describe this fragmented and contradictory condition of race, culture, and language which the modern and postcolonial writer must face when constructing a tradition from compromised materials, Walcott repeatedly refers to houses and buildings. He fuses this trope with questions of personal and literary genealogical inheritance and influence. Within these 'spaces' Walcott focuses on the ongoing and powerful presence of the past through the materiality of heirlooms and objects as they are charged with history and an aura of personal and intimate significances.[40] Throughout his oeuvre the house functions variously as a metonym for the fractured self in society; Walcott's family house is site of personal memory, and now a museum;[41] the shack, 'teetering and tough in unabashed unhope', is indicative of the poverty and divisions in Caribbean society; [42] the colonial manor is the legacy and presence of Empire; the ancestral home is figured as the idea of tradition; and, the experience and myriad designs of the West Indian city pose a challenge to any

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[38] Jahan Ramazani, 'Wound of Postcolonial History', p. 49.
[39] Jahan Ramazani, 'Wound of Postcolonial History', p. 49.
[40] The hotel is another of Walcott's loaded architectural images and is a neo-colonial site for the exploitation and invasion of sacred island space. As much as Walcott rails against tourism and the effects it has on the St. Lucian landscape and its people, he is forced to concede its economic benefits and acknowledge his complicity as a global traveller, who has also stayed in hotels in the Caribbean himself.
[41] For one of Walcott's most moving elegies see the poem to his mother and their family home. House and woman are fused: 'Old house, old woman, old room' as the house breathes and suffers the pains of fever and his mother's 'timbers hunning with constellations of carcinoma'. Derek Walcott, *Another Life* (2.III.270, 280), p. 13.The section ends with the achingly beautiful sense of resolution in abiding memory. Walcott finds he cannot move the objects which carry memories and signify a life lived, marriage vows kept. The grieving and the elegiac poetic process must faithfully but delicately represent the place:

> Finger each object, lift it
> from its place, and it screams again
> to be put down
> in its ring of dust, like the marriage finger
> frantic without its ring;
> I can no more move you from your true alignment,
> Mother, than we can move objects in paintings.
>
> Your house sang softly of balance,
> of the rightness of placed things.

Derek Walcott, *Another Life* (2.III.328-336), p. 15.
[42] Derek Walcott, *Another Life*, (23.III.3594), p. 151.

writer who attempts to capture its sensory complexity and variety, its convoluted histories, passages and forms.[43]

While the house illustrates the embodiment of empire and tradition, it is also indicative of Walcott's place in it and his response to that legacy. As a mediating figure between memory and history, the house becomes an archive and repository of the past, its myths and its traditions, and its deaths and traumas. Houses, like the broken islands, form interconnected spaces of habitation amidst nature's surfeit and history's devastation. They are always portrayed immersed in the landscape and placed in tension or relation to the light, sea and vegetation of the island, which often threatens and overwhelms the domestic spheres. As a perceptual figure through which to focalise these experiences, Walcott uses the Crusoe-castaway fused or in accompaniment with the narrator Ulysses 'subaltern-flâneur'.[44] Both figures increasingly dislocated and self-critical repeatedly wander amongst the scant ruins of statues to naval heroes and the ghostlier and threatening remnants of plantation economy which persistently haunt their imaginations meditating on the questions of memory, history, and belonging. For Walcott, the problem of and quarrel with history is figured though the experience of his surroundings as he laments, 'Where are your monuments, your battles, martyrs?'[45] In this ruinous space, Walcott's characters, when they yearn for the monumental presence of History, all encounter a pervading sense of emptiness and loss. They encounter the 'sigh of History' which rises over ruins, not over landscapes' and whilst there are 'few ruins to sigh over, apart from the ruins of sugar estates and abandoned forts' the powerful atmosphere of nostalgia, melancholia and loss pervades the imagination.[46]

It is useful to consider two early poems which lay the foundation for an understanding of Walcott's problematic relationship with English and its literary heritage. Since Walcott's 'method is to construct a series of interrelated images, the meaning of which develops as the works develop',[47] they also provide a source for images and a

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[43] See especially, Derek Walcott, 'On the Beat in Trinidad' *The New York Times* 5 October 1986, n.p.

[44] The term is an adaptation of Enda Duffy's discussion of Joyce's revision of the figure and the different variations including the empire's flâneur, the native colonial or subaltern flâneur, in relation to the prototypical modernist metropolitan flâneur. Enda Duffy, *The Subaltern Ulysses* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994), pp. 53-92.

[45] Derek Walcott, 'The Sea of History' *Poetry of Derek Walcott 1948-2013*, p. 253.

[46] Derek Walcott, 'The Antilles: Fragments of Epic Memory', *What the Twilight Says*, p. 68.

[47] Burnett, *Derek Walcott*, p. 160. Burnett, who argues that while Walcott writes poems whose design is 'unfailingly cohesive', Walcott 'for all his phenomenal inventiveness, has been remarkably consistent over a

dynamic of mixed lineage which recurs in *Omeros*. More fundamentally they shed light on the epistemological crisis and methodical strategies Walcott employs in his confrontation with empire, history, and literary traditions. First, in the poem 'Ruins of a Great House' Walcott recasts the seventeenth century country house poem in a colonial state of disrepair and neglect at the end of empire. Based on an actual visit to a Jamaican slave owner's house which profoundly affected the young Walcott,[48] the poem opens in a Gothic atmosphere of decay and the evanescent wisps of melancholic notes of past parties. The privileged profligacy of colonial extravagance is reduced to dust. The degeneration is naturalised and a lizard, the symbol of the island, who watches the passing of lives and waits nonchalantly to scuttle over the fallen monuments of society and empires. All that remains are,

> Stones only, the *disjecta membra* of this Great House,
> Whose mothlike girls are mixed with candledust,
> Remain to file the lizard's dragonish claws;
> The mouths of those gate cherubs streaked with stain.[49]

The Latinate phrase sticks out like an archaeological remnant, an incongruous and persistent fragment of a lost civilisation. Like Ozymandias's warning rendered subtly 'dejected' and a 'shadow' of former glory it is the diminished material remains of conquest and dominion stained with moral disapprobation. The subaltern speaker's attitude to the house modulates in complexities of tone and emotion, variously shifting from disgust, recrimination and rage to vexed admiration, understanding and even finally compassion. The speaker bitterly critiques the 'leprosy of Empire' as he attacks the hedonistic turpitude of the 'imperious rakes'.[50] He undercuts the pastoral idyll of a re-created British countryside manor (in reality a plantation house) through the ironically nostalgic 'Farewell' to 'green fields' and 'ye happy groves'. All the while the poem draws acerbic attention to the pungent 'smell of dead limes [which] quickens in the nose', the slave 'rotting in this manorial lake', and the fact that

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long career'. The continued development and 'play of similitude-in-difference' of images, tropes and motifs which form a pattern 'spiralling on and outward, across an extensive epic oeuvre'. This means that there is a case to be made for a consideration of interconnected images across poems and even potentially an 'extension' of term epic to his entire corpus.

[48] See Patricia Ismond, *Abandoning Dead Metaphors*, p. 40.

[49] Derek Walcott, 'Ruins of a Great House', *Poetry of Derek Walcott 1948-2013*, p.29.

[50] Derek Walcott, 'Ruins of a Great House', p.29.

empire or the 'world's green age' was 'rotting' whose 'stench became the charnel galleons text'.[51]

At his most recriminatory and angry Walcott still infuses his attack with the language of the canon, from Blake to Coleridge, Marvell to Donne. Even whilst implicating poet with conqueror, he cannot, and will not disavow them fully in his remonstrations and bitterness. In fact, it is through the act of breaking into the house, climbing the wall and 'grill ironwork' made by 'exiled craftsmen' beautifying and protecting the house, and listening to Kipling, the iconic imperial bard, that Walcott hears the death knell of empire and 'the abuse | Of ignorance by Bible and by sword'.[52] Whilst walking and thinking through the house with its echoes of poetic lines, Walcott ambivalently accepts that the '[a]ncestral murderers' were poets too and that history's rot remains and their legacy is 'more perplexed' by 'every ulcerous crime'. And yet, the 'coal of […] compassion' remains in the ashes that the wind 'fans the blackening ember of the mind'.[53]

Walcott's response to Empire and its iniquities and its legacy is twofold: outright condemnation, '[a]blaze with rage', and at the same time persistent entrancement still struggling with the 'coal of compassion and the rekindling of the fires of imagination fanned by the wind.[54] Finally, Walcott's resolution is acceptance of a universalising truth of continual phases of colonisation and the rise and fall of empires set against the unalterable law of natural decay and entropy. Echoing Conrad and developing Browne's epigraph, we realise that Albion too was once a colony, a place of darkness occupied by Romans. Invoking the common theme from antiquity of *memento mori* and the *ubi sunt* lyric, the poem is laced with the mock-epic. The 'worm's rent'[55] and the 'padded cavalry of the mouse' are the

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[51] Derek Walcott, 'Ruins of a Great House', p.29.
[52] Derek Walcott, 'Ruins of a Great House', p.29.
[53] Derek Walcott, 'Ruins of a Great House', p.29.
[54] Derek Walcott, 'Ruins of a Great House', p.29.
[55] Surely a pun on 'rent'. In 'Names' Walcott also uses worms (a common classical poetic figure) to illustrate both these conclusions: that the Caribbean remains a space ready to be re-named in spite of imperial domination, and yet that naming must recognise its limits in the face of a greater force, nature which holds ultimate prevalence over any human empire:

> These palms are greater than Versailles,
> for no man made them,
> their fallen columns greater than Castile,
> no man unmade them
> except the worm, who has no helmet
> but was always the emperor.

Derek Walcott, 'Names', *Poetry of Derek Walcott 1948-2013*, p. 209.

ultimate victors of this epic struggle. Walcott refuses to ignore the abjection of colonial reality (it remains in an unaccountable and unassimilable transgenerational debt of pain) but through the very same process of acquisition and inheritance he appropriates the tainted language of the colonizer, attempts to redress,[56] and to find recompense in the expression of the experiences of a colonial subjectivity, and even a generalised humanity embroiled in continual cycles of conquest. In this poem Walcott 'takes his first naked look at the violations and injustices of the slave past' but even while he is 'provoked to strong outrage', regardless how his efforts to his critics may be compromised, he strives for 'genuine reconciliation in the light of the Renaissance humanism of the Metaphysicals'.[57]

The tension is extreme and it represents the ongoing dilemma of Walcott as an artist caught in aesthetic and ethical binds. No matter how strong his 'revolutionary commitment to the cause and upliftment of his landscape' Walcott will not disregard his colonial past and accepts that to a certain extent 'it is in the light of the European mind and its spiritual tradition that the native image' must seek inspiration.[58] History teaches Walcott the fact the St. Lucian experience of colonialism is merely 'at the end of an endless chain of conquests including the Roman colonization of Britain'.[59] Terada's exposition finds that the speaker 'does not excuse "Ancestral murders"', but 'he does just manage to retain his ability to feel compassion for them'.[60] The reason he can do so is 'partly because the archaeological view of history shifts his focus from individuals to such concepts as imperialism, which have caused suffering from "Greece" to "Albion" to St. Lucia'.[61] This transposition of violence into natural cycles is not accepted by all critics as a satisfying response to colonial injustice and crimes. Rei Terada argues that 'Walcott's desire to place genocide in a natural context flirts with resignation'.[62] Nevertheless, Walcott's poetry and its particular inclusion of a 'paleological' view of history provides him with the hope of redress, or at least an alternative aesthetics. [63] Walcott describes this 'tough aesthetic of the New World' as one which neither explains nor forgives history and which refuses to be a

[56] The term is a significant one for Walcott. Used especially by his close friend Seamus Heaney the idea …
[57] Patricia Ismond, *Abandoning Dead Metaphors*, p. 40.
[58] Patricia Ismond, *Abandoning Dead Metaphors*, p. 41.
[59] Rei Terada, *Derek Walcott's Poetry*, p. 60. Terada has a brilliant reading of the poem which elucidates the implications of Walcott's use of Browne and Donne. See Terada*, Derek Walcott's Poetry*, pp. 60-66.
[60] Rei Terada, *Derek Walcott's Poetry*, pp. 65.
[61] Rei Terada, *Derek Walcott's Poetry*, pp. 65-66.
[62] Rei Terada, *Derek Walcott's Poetry*, p. 162.
[63] Rei Terada, *Derek Walcott's Poetry*, p. 62.

'literature of recrimination and despair' or 'revenge' written by the 'descendants of slaves' or 'a literature of remorse written by the descendants of masters'.[64]

In the second poem, 'Verandas', the notion of a house of poets is also implicit in this epic *topos* as is the more personal legacy and responsibility to one's forbears.[65] Walcott recognises the liberating and oppressive implications of abandonment; the colonial presence is an absent landlord who will rule from abroad, but also leaves the book open for the possibility of new readings and writing. Occupying a position both inside and outside the spaces of coloniality and established power, Walcott, seated on the veranda of the ruin of another colonial house, experiences the return of his ancestral past and his father's and grandfather's ghosts while he contemplates the lost age of empire:

> Gray apparitions at veranda ends
> Like smoke, divisible, but one
> Your age is ashes, its coherence gone.[66]

Walcott's role is, both as former subject shaped by colonial systems in the dying transitional moments of decolonisation and liberated epic poet, looking to the future but having to acknowledge the trauma of the past with an acknowledgment of mixed lineages and interrelated inheritances. He must contemplate twin legacies: the silence of the pain and suffering of lost African ancestry and the absence of affirmation from the European master-parentage allowing rightful succession. Set, then, at twilight, Walcott is an awkward emissary between two worlds. He will listen to the 'tarantara of the bugler, the sunset furled | round the last post' as the flag is lowered at the end of an empire over which the

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[64] Derek Walcott, 'The Muse of History', p. 37.

[65] This topos is extended through the use of the liminal space of the veranda where, like the beach, Walcott begins and ends *Another Life*:

> Verandahs, where the pages of the sea
> Are a book left open by an absent master

Derek Walcott, *Another Life* (1.I.1-2), p. 3.

> Looked from old verandahs at
> verandahs, sails, the eternal summer sea
> like a book left open by an absent master

Derek Walcott, *Another Life* (23.III.3582-3854), p. 150.

[66] Derek Walcott, 'Veranda', *Poetry of Derek Walcott 1948-2013*, p. 71.

sun never set.[67] Walcott must face these 'colonels, hard as the commonwealth's greenheart', the 'bully-boy roarers of the Empire club' and account for their debts as they 'kept an empire in the red' and yet are lauded and edified through imperial bric-a-brac in images as '[u]pholders of Victoria's china seas' 'embossed around a drinking mug'.[68] However, this is not a distant and detached matter of historical jingoism. As Walcott is the 'mixed son' he has the duty to gather his white grandfather's 'charred, blackened bones' which lie on a 'strange coast' after his grandfather was '[u]prooted from some rainy English shire'.[69] Walcott must raise the ghost of the past up so that he may rebury and provide poetic rites to his grandfather's ghost:

> Your house has voices, your burnt house,
> shrills with unguessed, lovely inheritors,
> your genealogical roof tree, fallen, survives,
> like seasoned timber through green, little lives.[70]

In the image of a fallen and ramshackle house regenerative offshoots and scions of unexpected inheritors represent Walcott and other previously disenfranchised poets and actors denied voices in the past. The 'green, little lives' are natural counterpoints to any grand heroic narrative of imperial construction. Hence, Walcott infuses the poem with images of 'ripening' and the generational line is carried not by a white race of colonists but the subjugated and suffering slaves who after their 'sea-crossing' 'like pressured trees brought diamonds out of coals'.[71] The geological image of sedimentation, transformation and release though coal formed into diamonds, and with the house burning into stars allows

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[67] Derek Walcott, 'Veranda', p. 71. The scene is a common one in Walcott's work. Consider the lines from *Another Life*:

> Begin with twilight, when a glare
> which held a cry of bugles lowered
> the coconut lances of the inlet,
> as a sun, tired of empire, declined.

Derek Walcott, *Another Life* (1.I.8-11), p. 3.

[68] Derek Walcott, 'Veranda', p. 71.

[69] Derek Walcott, 'Veranda', p. 71. The poem is autobiographical. Walcott's paternal grandfather Charles Walcott emigrated from England to join a line of Walcott's who had settled in Barbados and had five children with Christiana Wardrope a local black woman. His death in a fire was reputedly a suicide. Bruce King, *Derek Walcott*, pp. 7-8.

[70] Derek Walcott, 'Veranda', p. 72.

[71] Derek Walcott, 'Veranda', p. 72.

Walcott to acknowledge the violence of the colonial past in terms of a much vaster cycle of history.

In a similar gesture to the one in 'Ruins of a Great House', Walcott, if not absolves, at least partially reconciles, himself to the wrongs of British oppression, in part because of the knowledge that they too were once oppressed, and mostly because of his implicit view of history. This gesture means that he is able to graciously accept the close co-identification with grandfather and father, thereby tentatively making amends for past ills. The speaker becomes the 'man my father loved and was' and whatever love Charles had for his family of mixed illegitimates, he creates a line in the transcendent stars (the lives lost) and in the ruins, sanctifies a place. The poet will

> climb the stair
>
> And stretch a darkening hand to greet those friends
> who share with you the last inheritance
> of earth, our shrine and pardoner,
>
> gray, ghostly loungers at veranda ends.[72]

Arguably, Walcott's position in relation to the violence of colonial pasts and the complicity of inherited literary tradition remains fairly consistent in its ambivalence.[73] It is revealing to notice the echoes and similarities between these early evocations and the epic *Omeros*, especially when Walcott is attempting to establish an epic line or lineage for his own poetic authority and status as a St. Lucian poet. One of the founding conventions of epic is based on the idea of the perpetuation of poetic genealogy passed down from ancestors to new generations. This ensures the continuity of cultural heritage and literary authority. For the

[72] Derek Walcott, 'Veranda', p. 72.

[73] Victor Figueroa concedes that this 'ontological question remains important, and even central, to the poet's inquiry' but by the time of writing of *Omeros* he claims that 'the balance begins to shift toward a different kind of question: a question of an ethical nature'. Victor Figueroa, *Not at Home in One's Home*, p. 159. By concentrating on the epistemological concerns, I hope to show how both ontological and ethical questions are active in Walcott's fundamental questioning and critique of epic traditions and colonial structures of knowledge and activated in the very process of his attempt to construct an epic of his own. Not to labour the building metaphor, but it would seem Walcott needs to assess how to re-build and repair a dwelling from the shards of ruined houses with incomplete or compromised plans.

epic as a genre, this is suggestive in that 'Homeric bloodlines become literary lineage' or 'genre'. The sanctity and power of names suggest hidden lineages and links to founding actions or characteristics perpetuating an intertextual 'line', 'race', 'family' or lineage.[74] In a patriarchal system this will inevitably concentrate on the relationship between fathers and sons.[75] For Walcott, and all of his castaway bastards, given their mixed heritages and their status as colonial subjects, they will not automatically accede to the laurel or mantle of epic poet. And as we shall see they are hybrid and contain mixed, interrupted chains of filiation. To redress this condition, he adopts several strategies: he claims ownership not by birth right, but by sheer adamic exuberance, wonder and awe; he surreptitiously and audaciously appropriates the tools of the master; and, through creolisation in the labour and poetic form itself, he mixes, re-constructs, and establishes an alternative lineage which effectively 're-roots' or re-grafts the epic line.

These images and tropes of houses and homes are woven into *Omeros* as Walcott revisits the houses of family histories and cultural tradition to contemplate the memories of the past and the legacy of colonialism in spaces which are deeply personal and historical. For example, the personal trials of the self with its changes, losses and recriminations are figured in terms of houses and the uncanny experience of absences within them. The narrator visits his family's 'house with its bougainvillea trellises, | the front porch gone' which has become a print shop. In a deft and clever cinematic[76] juxtaposition and

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[74] Line Henriksen, *Ambition and Anxiety: Ezra Pound's Cantos and Derek Walcott's Omeros as Twentieth Century Epics* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2006), pp.3, 4.

[75] This is a problematic distinction and one which Walcott will change within *Omeros* itself in his portrayal of Ma Kilman and Maud, the Penelope figure, who weaves history with ornithology in a naturalised aesthetic web.

[76] There is much in *Omeros* that I find to be inspired from film production and which uses the language and visual methods of cinema. This scene seems to use the fade in and out technique of memory in which time is blurred and transitions from present into past. The most direct and clearly metafictional use of cinematic language is the mock-heroic, even melodramatic, re-imagination of 'road-warrior' Hector's death in the mode of montage and an action scene with a series of dramatic cuts from one scene to the next. Derek Walcott, *Omeros*, pp. 230-231. Not just artistic and narratological ploys for visualisation and narrative effect, the film cues also have cultural and even ideological significance. In the death scene, and particularly in Achille's return to Africa the film references are metafictional in the sense that they deliberately point to the artificiality and constructedness of the text. No one can imagine Hector's death. And, the idea of Africa which Achille experiences in his hallucination is thoroughly mediated. Walcott, undercuts any utopian return to an ideal Africa by showing that it is sourced from filmic representations of a stereotypical Africa:

> It was just like the African movies
> he had yelped at in childhood. The endless river unreeled
>
> those images that flickered into real mirages

Derek Walcott, *Omeros*, p. 133.

superimposition, Walcott describes how the changes in furnishings, the office printing activity create an uncanny sense of difference and fluidity between past and present. The sensation of noise, light, colour - the 'Pink handbills' associated with his 'mother's rose quilt', the printing machines with sewing machines, sheets of paper with linen reveal a past contiguous to and simultaneous with the present. The effect is quickened by the sense of film reeling and text printing: The movement of the handbills 'under their spinning negative' are stacked and replicated 'as fast as' Walcott's mental images or memories are 'reprinted | as I remembered them'.[77] The house reflects on the kindness and love of his mother. The dissolution of time in the filmic representation of consciousness projecting images of the past onto the surface of the present is made explicit as the ghostly figure of his mother who appears 'framed in the quiet window for whom this was home' and makes familiar and subtle characteristic movements, 'tracing its dust, rubbing thumb and middle finger.'[78] The figure is real and alive and present as if Walcott watches a living image:

> then coming to me, not past, but through the machines,
> clear as a film and as perfectly projected
>
> as a wall cut by the jalousies' slanted lines.[79]

The strange middle section of the poem, the only part in which Walcott disrupts the *terza rima* form and breaks or splits it into couplets,[80] depicts the lowest moment of the narrator's isolation after a broken marriage and lonely travels:

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In another disruption of form, Walcott introduces the genre of film script or perhaps dramatic theatrical play when he relays the scene between Achille and his father Afolabe. Derek Walcott, *Omeros*, pp. 137-138.

[77] Derek Walcott, *Omeros*, p. 67-68.

[78] Derek Walcott, *Omeros*, p. 67-68.

[79] Derek Walcott, *Omeros*, p. 68. The image of the dust and the thumbing and touching of objects from the household past is present in the earlier elegy to his mother's home in *Another Life*.

[80] In Callahan's close analysis of this 'prosody [which] is truly incongruous' with the rest of the poem, he argues that the variation from the more '*recherché*' forms to the popular four beat ubiquitous popular song or lullaby reveals a 'sudden strength and regularity of stresses' which sets up a 'pounding, almost violent cadence' which is also 'unnerving, hypnotic'. Callahan*, In the Shadows*, p. 33, 34. The effect of this complex variety in prosody is to 'compose the most disturbing, angst-ridden section of *Omeros* in a verse form usually associated with lullabies' in a 'poetic reversal of Eurocentric poetic practice'. Callahan, *In the Shadows*, p. 35. It is another instance of what Callahan argues is Walcott's 'metrical contract' with the reader to raise expectations and then to disrupt them in the complex variations of a new form. Callahan, *In the Shadows*, p. 37.

House of umbrage, house of fear,
house of multiplying air

House of memories that grow
like shadows out of Allan Poe […]

Unlucky house that I uncurse
by rites of genuflecting verse

House I unhouse, house that can harden
as cold as stones in the lost garden[81]

In this section Walcott plays with numerology to order the chapter, roughly in the middle of the text and ironically Chapter XXX, section iii.[82] Through the course of the lyric, Walcott transforms the sense of haunting unhomely exile of a mere shadowy house with banal everyday objects into a space of respite and acceptance, one which is more inviting and fit to be called home; it is even a place to invite guests, even if they are the ghosts of relationships past. Through the power of verse as prayer of supplication and atonement with the memory of a home carried inside himself, all the whilst confronting absence, fears and the past, in a moment of reconciliation and home/love making, Walcott reveals that:

I do not live in you, I bear
my house inside, everywhere

until
[…]

[81] Derek Walcott, *Omeros*, p. 173.
[82] Lance Callahan expands this to include a series of three: characters, plots, places and names, and formal patterns in tercets, number of sections in each chapter. Callahan, *In the Shadows*, Note 3., p. 125. Other critics have ventured further into this rather murky territory: Maik Nwosu finds 'symbolic meaning' in the numbers three, four and seven' and attempts to link these numbers to African folktales and an African sign system. Maik Nwosu, 'Derek Walcott's *Omeros* and the Refiguration of the Caribbean Eden', *Journal of Postcolonial Writing*, 44.2 (2008), pp. 127-137, p. 133. Don Barnard attributes this numerological impulse to a 'ludic Walcott' and argues that the chances and patterns seem to point to a deliberate effort. Don Barnard, Walcott's *Omeros*, pp. 76-77.

House that lets in, at last, those fears
that are its guests, to sit on chairs

feasts on their human faces, and
takes pity simply by the hand

shows her her room, and feels the hum
of wood and brick becoming home.[83]

Here Walcott's eye for domestic simplicity is amplified by the variation in prosody which is 'incantatory in its repetitive simplicity' and has implications for the whole poem as the section is 'a miniature of the overlapping actions affecting the narrator and all the protagonists' as they are preoccupied with 'convert[ing] a house, a colony, or a nation into a home' they must 'confront inner as well as external sources of alienation'.[84] Maud will also dream of making a house on her new Island. It is partly dream and partly ongoing acclimatisation and accommodation to the sometimes alien and challenging environment.

She thought: I dreamed of this house with woods around it […]
It's as clear as a dream,
But more real.[85]

She finds a sense of home in simple life and sensual perceptions of candles, piano airs and the sea and moon which she associates with Achille's canoe (his house of sorts) and which in turn prompts these lines epigrammatic of the entire poem:

*In God We Troust*.
But then we all trust in Him, and that's why we know

[83] Derek Walcott, *Omeros*, p. 173
[84] Robert D. Hamner, *Epic of the Dispossessed*, pp. 90-91.
[85] Derek Walcott, *Omeros*, pp. 66-67.

the peace of a wandering heart when it is housed.[86]

Elsewhere, colonial space is shown decrepit and decayed as abandoned plantations, scarred former sites of labour and exploitation that have given way to the recrudescence of natural growth and in which Philoctete bitterly tends his yam garden. The road to the estate is 'broken' and 'abandoned', the plot strewn with old 'twisted logwoods trunks […] orange from sea-blast', macabre and sinister 'huge rusted cauldrons, vats for boiling the sugar'.[87] These remnants are 'the only ruins | left' by history, 'if history is what they are'.[88]

The decayed and fragmented house reflects Walcott's ambivalence and mixed heritage. As shown it often takes on a lyric and personal 'agonistic'[89] form but it is mainly reflective of social and cultural tensions and part of his wider complex and often fraught negotiation with various trends and movements in West Indian cultural politics over questions of history, identity, and language. Neither able to embrace wholeheartedly the negritude movement of the 1960 and 1970s with its adoption of a Pan-African rooted identity nor willing to acquiesce uncomplicatedly to an Anglophilic assimilation into European and English culture leaving behind the 'nothingness' of the West Indies, Walcott would doggedly, stubbornly, and cantankerously remain in the West Indies and also demand a nuanced position of relation with the wider world. This was often at the risk of alienation and harsh critique when he continued to pursue a poetics inclusive and open to Western literary form and styles; and, ironically, after international success facing his opponents who caustically argued such a style privileged Walcott, contributed to an ahistorical poetics, and in fact allowed for his acceptance into the halls of global literary fame.[90] To describe his

[86] Derek Walcott, *Omeros*, p. 67.
[87] Derek Walcott, *Omeros*, p. 20.
[88] Derek Walcott, *Omeros*, p. 20.
[89] The term is Figueroa's and it describes a broadly identitarian approach to Walcott's work which either filters the dilemma generically through the lyric as an expression of inner conflicts in direct tension with the epic search for narration of a communal and social collective. Figueroa argues that it can also be viewed as a dichotomy of 'contradictory movements: the centripetal articulation of a private, intimate subjectivity in the midst of a work whose centrifugal impulse tends toward issues of collective affirmation and social denunciation'. Victor Figueroa, *Not at Home in One's Home*, pp. 148-149.
[90] This debate is linked to the wider controversies of the commodification of 'third world' voices in the global circulation and production of World Literature of which literary prizes, publishing houses and networks of writers are seen to collude, or at least be complicit in, a domestication, sanitisation, and homogenising of difference, alterity, and untranslatable cultural content.

position Walcott characterises himself as a 'mulatto of style'.[91] He assigns his epic task as 'dedicated to purifying the language of the tribe'.[92] Walcott will always attempt a fusion of 'the language of the master' and the 'language of dialect' so that he may be able to 'master the original language, or the language of the master himself, and yet have it fertilized by the language of dialect'.[93]

Walcott has consistently contested 'the language politics that sets up false choices between orality and the literary, split on class and race lines' as he tries to find a nuanced position despite being '"jumped on by both sides for pretentiousness or playing white"'.[94] Walcott certainly did not passively accept criticism. He was often defensive and vehement in his response and justifications. On the one hand Walcott could speak critically and quite harshly of those who would contemptuously reject Western literary influences and attempt a revival of 'African pastoralism' at the expense of the range and power afforded by use of English and its heritage, or risk the exclusion of the myriad other cultures and traditions in the West Indies.[95] His most severe approbation is reserved for those who go further to use

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[91] Derek Walcott, 'What the Twilight Says', pp. 9, 8. Importantly, this is a defensive self-description which Walcott ironically uses in an hypothetical invective and admonishment from writers of the 'African revival' who, he argues would pander to the touristic commodity in false and profane folk revival and the blasphemy of appropriation of 'African culture' or reduce literature to a 'pathos of sociology, self-pitying and patronized' of a realism obsessed with chronicling only social ills and woes in novels which are 'propaganda tracts'. Derek Walcott, 'What the Twilight Says', pp. 8-9.

[92] Derek Walcott, 'What the Twilight Says', p. 8. The lines are direct allusion to T. S. Eliot's 'Little Gidding' and they re-situate modernist calls for epic speech, and collective historical and prophetic vision in a postcolonial context:

> Since our concern was speech, and speech impelled us
> To purify the dialect of the tribe
> And urge the mind to aftersight and foresight,
> Let me disclose the gifts reserved for age
> To set a crown upon your lifetime's effort.

T. S. Eliot, 'Little Gidding', *Collected Poems 1909-1962* (London: Faber and Faber, 1963), p. 218.

[93] Derek Walcott, 'Reflections Before and After Carnival: An Interview with Derek Walcott by Sharon Ciccarelli (1977)' in *Conversations*, p. 45. This is partly an extension of modernist ventriloquism, but also is the same struggle any individual poet faces as they try to find their own voice amongst the literary pantheon and culture's speech. *Omeros* illustrates Walcott's flexibility and late style which has developed from an early imitative phase and matured into an outward confidence to render the voice of others whilst still retaining the sensitive lyric poetic consciousness or signature of Walcott himself.

[94] Burnett, *Derek Walcott*, p. 139.

[95] This widely publicised series of arguments coalesced (unhelpfully in many ways as it betrayed their affinities and commonalities) around the time of the Black Power movement in an opposition between Walcott and Brathwaite. Walcott commented what most concerned him about the cultural politics of the movement was the 'narrowing down of everything to a kind of idea called heritage, being particularly black, emphatically black in the Caribbean, which I consider to be very narrow-minded since, obviously, the presence of the Indian and the Chinese makes that idea of heritage' more complex. Derek Walcott, 'Interview with Smith' in *Our Other Voices: Nine Poets Speaking*, ed. by John Wheatcroft (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press), pp. 171-196, pp. 189-190. Pollard argues that this is a little 'disingenuous' of Walcott who hardly refers to Chinese or Indian

this to construct an overtly politicised and romanticised identity propagating a culture of victimhood exploiting the trauma of slavery in trying to find either a pure African past or a narrowly purist segment of Caribbean culture and history.[96] On the other hand, Walcott refuses to play the minstrel or the subservient mimic to the metropole.[97] Nor will he venerate European culture uncritically and give in to the 'self-hating adoration of Europe "as nourishing museum"'.[98] He refused to choose between traditions arguing that he has as much right to both. Walcott defends his use of the English tradition and rejects criticisms in which he is labelled as Eurocentric. He vehemently rejects V. S. Naipaul's concept of the mimic man by forcefully arguing that mimicry, as part of a craft or apprenticeship in the arts, is more a source of imagination and creativity than mere copying, and as such it represents a viable response to West Indian hybridity. If language is 'condemned as mimicry' then 'the condition is hopeless and men are no more than jackdaws, parrots, myna

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cultures in his work, and a footnote of his points to a more personal animus against Brathwaite who rose to success on the wave of the pan-African movement, whilst Walcott with his European sensibility was neglected. See Gordon Rohlehr, *Pathfinder*, 111-112.

[96] Walcott will fixate on a certain 'tribe' of these poets who he argues are 'saints of self-torture' and 'measure each other's sores | to boast who has suffered most'. He reserves a special place for these writers in a particularly harsh, and even racist by contemporary standards, portrayal of poets who are thrown into in the *malebroge* in *Another Life*:

> Those who peel, from their own leprous flesh, their names,
> who chafe and nurture the scars of rusted chains,
> like primates favouring scabs, those who charge tickets
> for another free ride on the middle passage […] *Another Life*, (19.I.2953-2956), p. 127.

Interestingly, Walcott has mellowed somewhat by the time he re-writes the inferno scene in *Omeros*. In this mock-revision of Orpheus' ascent all poets, especially including himself, are guilty of the sin of pride, self-indulgence and superficiality. They are '[s]elfish phantoms' in a 'backbiting circle, mockers and self-loved' condemned as they use people's poverty in their verse for their own artistic ends. Walcott must answer the question too. He nearly escapes with the aid of Omeros, lead, but Walcott also looks away (he must fix his eyes on the scene) in a glance of contempt and 'bubbling its half-lies'. Thus, he also gets dismembered and his head sinks in the 'black mud of Soufrière' forced to look dejectedly back. Derek Walcott, *Omeros*, pp. 293-294.

[97] This is a complex and tangled knot of arguments where the cultural and political stakes are high. Walcott consistently revalued mimicry as part of creative apprenticeship and defended his poetic process of assimilation, appropriation and adaptation. This contains the element of 'counter-discursive subversion indicative of a post-colonial consciousness' which Thieme would argue absolves or justifies creative adaptation as different and more politically valuable than mere absorption. John Thieme, *Derek Walcott*, p. 29. But if we read Walcott carefully, his linguistic and stylistic choices, especially in poetry, are not reducible to this political reading either, and Walcott would resist his cooption to any simplistic postcolonial writing back. His defiant statement, 'To be told by politicians, or by critics, or by anyone at all … that you are imitating is odd' cuts both ways. For Walcott, the ultimate value is a liberal and individualistic one: the freedom of the poet and his choices to be judged aesthetically. But as Pollard shows, by arguing that 'the representations of all cultural forms are equally derivative and therefore equally permissible' Walcott 'risks masking those historical inequalities to reimagine a new interethnic cultural community'. Charles Pollard, *New World Modernisms*, pp. 34-35, 36.

[98] Ian Gregory Strachan, *Paradise and Plantation: Tourism and Culture in the Anglophone Caribbean* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2002), p. 197.

birds, apes'.[99] For Walcott, the Caribbean poet should be emboldened by mimicry and never limit him or herself to an exclusive strain of historical identity or linguistic tradition. Walcott 'advocates the New World writer's mimicking all of the available cultural traditions until he or she masters them'.[100] Walcott emphasises that this will not merely replicate, reinstate, and perpetuate hierarchies of power. Nor does mimicry risk nostalgia and the false promises of authenticity of lost historical identities. Rather mimicry is the necessity of invention, essential in a context of self-sufficiency, and the mastery and skill involved in the process 'will enable the writer to create a new cultural tradition that unifies the diversity of the region and informs a new collective sense of identity'.[101] Walcott advocates a judicious and self-conscious adoption and adaption acknowledging the historical layering of names. In 'The Schooner *Flight*' the sailor sings back (altered echoes of the phrase the 'empire writes back') to trees variously named cedars, cypresses, or casuarinas taking into account both the 'pain of history that words contain' and 'the love [for] those trees':

> 'They're classic trees, and we,
> if we live like the names our masters please,
> by careful mimicry might become men.'[102]

By not attempting to reconcile but create from the relation between competing cultural and historical identities and claims Walcott embraces all sides of his past:

> Mongrel as I am, something prickles in me when I see the word Ashanti as with the word Warwickshire, both separately intimating my grandfathers' roots, both baptising this neither proud nor ashamed bastard, this hybrid, this West Indian.[103]

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[99] Derek Walcott, 'The Caribbean: Culture or Mimicry (1974)', in Hamner, *Critical Perspectives*, p. 53. In this essay Walcott argues, again counter-intuitively, that Naipaul's charge of mimicry contains a valuable and 'astonishing truth' and Walcott accepts the notion as a fundamental truth of the New World American poetics as it is in fact an 'act of the imagination' and 'endemic cunning' – in other words a device, strategy or tactic for survival, 'as defence and as lure'. Derek Walcott, 'The Caribbean: Culture or Mimicry (1974)', in Hamner, *Critical Perspectives*, p. 55.
[100] Charles Pollard, *New World Modernisms*, p. 35.
[101] Charles Pollard, *New World Modernisms*, p. 36.
[102] Derek Walcott, 'The *Schooner Flight*', *Poetry of Derek Walcott*, pp. 244-245.
[103] Derek Walcott, 'What the Twilight Says', p. 10.

Figueroa notes that this is an incredibly difficult balance, and instead of 'privileging' any of these elements Walcott has chosen 'to remain in agonistic balance between them'.[104] Maintaining it 'sometimes appears to be the result of sheer will power, of a stubbornness that refuses to simplify complex situations'.[105] Throughout his career Walcott has 'always been careful to highlight the intimate relation between his 'inner' contradictions and the sociopolitical paradoxes that pervade his colonial (and post-colonial) condition as experienced in his native Caribbean, and as inherited from his mixed African and European descent'.[106]

Ultimately Walcott seeks refuge in the freedom of the imagination, steadfastly retaining faith in the integrity of art. When the bard-traveller Shabine in 'The Schooner *Flight*' finds himself rejected by 'the white man, the niggers didn't want me' and he realises that he 'has no nation now but the imagination'.[107] He quite bluntly states his hybrid lineage of fragmented cultures, and is drawn to the sea:

> I'm just a red nigger who love the sea,
> I had a sound colonial education,
> I have Dutch, nigger, and English in me,
> and either I'm nobody, or I'm a nation.[108]

'Nobody' as with the 'nothing' of the Caribbean space is doubled-edged. It is both curse and blessing. It is an extreme ideological reduction and diminishment of self, and also it is the space of emptiness necessary for creation – and, in allusive trickery, it is also the epithet Ulysses uses cunningly to escape from Cyclops.[109]

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[104] Victor Figueroa, *Not at Home in One's Home*, p. 156.
[105] Victor Figueroa, *Not at Home in One's Home*, p. 156.
[106] Victor Figueroa, *Not at Home in One's Home*, p. 156.
[107] Derek Walcott, 'The *Schooner Flight*', *Poetry of Derek Walcott*, p. 241.
[108] Derek Walcott, 'The Schooner *Flight*', *Poetry of Derek Walcott*, p. 238. Breslin claims the line may have replaced the ending from 'The Far Cry from Africa' as 'Walcott's most quoted passage'. Breslin, *Nobody's Nation*, p. 189. Seanna Sumalee Oakley calls them 'crowd-pleasers' and adds, 'The sea is History' to the cocktail party list. Seanna Sumalee Oakley, *Common Places: The Poetics of African Atlantic Postromantics* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2011), fn. 2, p. 57.
[109] Fumagalli points out that the 'pseudonym 'nobody' that Shabine claims for himself is the imaginative stratagem that allows Odysseus to save his life' and it 'signifies the necessity of imagination' which 'plays such a crucial part in the West Indian 'quarrel' with history'. Maria Cristina Fumagalli, *The Flight of the Vernacular: Seamus Heaney, Derek Walcott and the Impress of Dante* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2001), p. 113.

Race is not the only source of tension and division to be addressed by Walcott's poetics. Walcott also felt the estrangement of education and class, especially in terms of the pressures to migrate, and the alienation and opportunity successful travel affords. Arguably it is the intersection between race and class which most preoccupies Walcott in *Omeros*. By the time he writes *Omeros* his antipathetic views on African heritage have been tempered and he confidently assimilates and alludes to Afro-Caribbean religions and cultures, and as we have seen, tentatively explores the katabatic route back to Africa in search for origins.[110] For Ogaga Ifowodo '*Omeros* marks a growth and refinement of Walcott's sensibility from the polemical note of internecine literary quarrels and the paralysing conundrum' of racial and linguistic divisions so prevalent in the early to middle phase of his career.[111] But now class becomes more significant; though it is not an entirely new perception of difference. Walcott describes a childhood recollection of thwarted yearning to belong and participate in a Christian march which has been creolised with a 'native beat' into a carnival-like atmosphere:

> Yet, like the long, applauded note, joy soared farther from two pale children staring from their upstairs window, wanting so much to march with that ragged, barefooted crowd, but who could not because they were not black and poor, until for one of them, watching the shouting, limber congregation, that difference became sadness, that sadness rage, and that longing to share their lives ambition.[112]

Particularly noticeable is the confluence of differences marked by skin tone, relative privilege and alienation, which marks such an ambivalent memory and sparks young Walcott's desire to create theatre as a way of joining in. Art will become the hope for healing and paradoxically the wedge that will further divide. In an interview in which he

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[110] Amongst other critics, both Tynan and Pollard have pointed out that Walcott's views have undergone a major shift in relation to African sources of culture. But Pollard is quick to point out that this must be seen as part of a development in Walcott's 'ideal of a cosmopolitan Caribbean tradition, language and identity' and implicitly it is critiqued as part of Walcott's self-fashioning as an international poet. Pollard, *New World Modernisms*, p. 147-148.

[111] Ogaga Ifowodo, *History, Trauma, and Healing in Postcolonial Narratives: Re-constructing Identities* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), p. 99.

[112] Derek Walcott, 'What the Twilight Says', p. 19-20.

expands his use of the term 'schizophrenic'[113] Walcott details the deep split in language and psyche which influences the dramatic work of developing an ethical aesthetic style and poetic in St. Lucia:

> This society is still patterned on the stratification between rich and poor black. He who has acquired education finds himself on the thin line of the split in society. The artist instinctively moves towards his people on that root level, and yet, at the same time, he must survive. This split is equivalent to a state of schizophrenia. Much deeper is the historic racial split resulting in two kinds of bloods, almost two kinds of people.[114]

The split creates another dimension to the double consciousness – Du Bois' characterisation of the African American 'two-ness of being' in a predominantly white and segregated and racist society as the American Negro struggles with the burden of impossible reconciliation of 'two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder'. But Walcott describes this 'doubleness' in terms of language and fractured interiority. As much as it is a matter of the 'problem' of race, it is also a question of class and education. Being caught between the two worlds of Western literary works and the reality of life in St. Lucia resulted in a 'schizophrenic boyhood' where one 'could lead two lives': one, the 'outward life of action and dialect', and the other, the 'interior life of poetry'.[115] Walcott clearly states that he is 'a kind of split writer; I have one tradition inside me going in one way, and another going another way. The mimetic, the Narrative, and dance element is strong on one side, and the literary, the classical tradition is strong on the other'.[116]

The splits are figured in multiple ways but here interestingly it correlates with a distinction between language forms and genres entangled with the need to give shape and

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[113] Building on previous comments on the term and implications of the word 'schizophrenia', by 1990 Walcott admits that he 'uses that word too casually' but clarifies that the 'idea of division is permanent in all countries that have been colonial' and that it is a 'shadow, a kind of meridian, a crossing that has to be examined'. Derek Walcott, 'An Interview with J. P. White (1990)', in *Conversations with Derek Walcott*, p. 156.

[114] Derek Walcott, 'Reflections Before and After Carnival: An Interview with Derek Walcott by Sharon Ciccarelli (1977)' in *Conversations*, p. 39.

[115] Derek Walcott, 'What the Twilight Says', p. 4.

[116] Derek Walcott, 'Meanings (1970)' in *Critical Perspectives on Derek Walcott*, ed. by Robert D. Hamner (Boulder: Lynne Reinner, 1996), pp. 45-50, p. 48.

meaning to Caribbean realities: the mimetic or realist form of the novel linked to the linear narrative, combined (perhaps rather counter-intuitively) with dance or the public performance of drama and theatre. On the other, the written and classical tradition associated with the privacy of verse and poetry is the counter force. In other instances, this opposition is figured in other terms. For instance, between elitism or high culture and populist or folk culture. Or the oral as opposed to the written. These divergences are also registered between an inner language of poetry or the highly nuanced fluid daily prose of dialect and the more 'stable', transcribed language written and formalised into genre or discourse. For Walcott, the condition of the West Indian poet is that he/she is,

> faced with a language which he hears but cannot write because there are no symbols for such a language and because the closer he brings hand and word to the precise inflections of the inner language and to the subtlest accuracies of his ear, the more chaotic his symbols will appear on the page, the smaller the regional dialect, the more eccentric his representation of it will become, so his function remains the old one of being filter and purifier never losing the tone and strength of the common speech as he uses the hieroglyphs, symbols, or alphabet of the official one.[117]

When Walcott outlines the challenges for the writer in the Caribbean he focusses precisely on this question of culture, experience and language and the differences and difficulties in rendering them accurately. But he finds himself complicit in a double bind of sorts: unable to truly capture the complexity of local dialect and speech he must make accommodations to the official language; but the official language places him on the side of the imperial power, and is also compromised by its tendency to homogenise and erase difference. The language as a carrier of culture and more directly as a tool of colonisation is also burdened with the trauma and violence of an oppressive past. These differences are further entrenched by education which tends to affirm, and consolidate or legitimise a standardised and official language at the expense of other dialects. For Walcott, as is the case for other postcolonial writers,[118] this difference is concretised through language and embroiled in the

[117] Derek Walcott, 'The Muse of History', p. 49.

[118] The problem of language as the carrier of culture and the past burdened by its legacy as the tool of imperial power is repeated across the world wherever postcolonial countries struggle for liberation of expression and

cultural politics of English and Creole. Recounting his experience as a teacher of 'Love's basic Latin: | *Amo, amas, amat*' in 'tweed jacket and tie' to boys who like him had raged against instruction preferring the natural language of 'swaying words of sea', Walcott uncomfortably knows that Latin, and by extension the literary heritage of a distant colonising power, is in some respects anachronistic to the life and experience of the children. He realises, at least in the first part of the poem, that,

> The discipline I preached
> made me a hypocrite;
> their lithe black bodies, beached,
> would die in dialect;
>
> I spun the globe's meridian,
> showed its sealed hemispheres,
> but where were those brows heading
> when neither world was theirs? [119]

Absolute reconciliation between worlds, hemispheres, cultures and languages seems an impossible hope for the poet as his language will never unite socially complex and multiple groups. Nor can a pure language affirm a total transcendent locus of authenticity or coincidence of representation with reality. This does have immediate impact on the possibility of an epic in the Caribbean, especially when one of the central claims for the epic is that it must be a communal poem in the public voice of an epic bard who speaks for the community and its history and values. Walcott's challenge is to hold onto the idea of the epic bard whose relationship to his society is paramount whilst acknowledging the multiplicity of voices and experiences of the Caribbean. The 'good poet is the proprietor of the experience of the race […] he is and always has been the vessel, vates, rainmaker, the

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self-affirmation of identities through revolutionary and/or reconciliatory literary forms. Despite the obvious differences and subtleties of varying contexts, one instructive parallel which set the terms of the issue for a generation of postcolonial writers is the seminal works and debate between Chinua Achebe and Ngugi wa Thiong'o. In the context of Walcott's decision mostly to use standard English see Pollard, *New World Modernisms*, pp. 82-85.

[119] Derek Walcott, 'A Latin Primer', *The Arkansas Testament* (London: Faber and Faber), p. 22-23.

conscience of the king and the embodiment of society, even when society is unable to contain him'.[120]

Underlying these tensions of experience and expression in epic or adequate social forms discussed above are always oppositional centripetal and centrifugal forces which can be usefully read in Bakhtinian terms: one which correlates to the tension between the unifying centripetal forces which totalises and creates the monologism of the epic and social order (the hegemonic), and the diversifying and multitudinous, sometimes ungraspable, social and interior speech acts which decentralise and are part of the heteroglossia of textual and social languages (the subaltern-subversive). The Bakhtinian view has been to cast epic as a record of the victory of an official language and narrative endorsed by power (theological or political) and amalgamated into a national form which unifies and erases difference:

> The victory of one reigning language [dialect] over the others, the supplanting of languages, their enslavement, the process of illuminating them with the True Word, the incorporation of barbarians and lower social strata into a unitary language of culture and truth, the canonization of ideological systems, philology with its methods of studying and teaching dead languages, languages that were by that very fact 'unities,' Indo-European linguistics with its focus of attention, directed away from language plurality to a single proto-language – all this determined the content and power of the category of 'unitary language' in linguistic and stylistic thought. [121]

Bakhtin places epic on the monological side of this dichotomy, but Walcott, in an inversion and hybridisation of Bakthin's dichotomy finds his distinctive form of epic equal to the task of representing the heteroglossia and multitudinous facets of Caribbean society. For him the question is a matter of reconciling experience and perception with the numerous languages he encounters by creating a hybrid form. In *Omeros* Walcott addresses and complicates this binary between language and power by constructing a language 'base' of the epic of

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[120] Derek Walcott, 'Poetry – Enormously Complicated Art', qtd. in Robert D. Hamner, *Derek Walcott* (New York: Twayne, 1993), p. 164.

[121] See Simon Dentith, 'Heroic Poetry in a Novelized Age: Epic and Empire in Nineteenth-Century Britain' *Bakhtin and the Nation*, Ed. by San Diego Bakhtin Circle (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press), pp. 68-82, p. 70.

relation which is in its open multiplicities and anti-hegemonic connections and encounters with other languages and forms of expression. Glissant argues that in contrast to the conqueror's use of force and language to dominate through the modes of transparency and generalisation, 'Relation […] is spoken multilingually'.[122] It retains a radical freedom and elusive creative energy which goes 'beyond the impositions of economic forces and cultural pressures' so that 'Relation rightfully opposes the totalitarianism of any monolingual intent'.[123] Relation is also a poetics of freedom and unique expression. In his Nobel Speech Walcott writes in bold affirmation of poetry's value and subversive power:

> There is the buried language and there is the individual vocabulary, and the process of poetry is one of excavation and of self-discovery. Tonally the individual voice is a dialect; it shapes its own accent, its own vocabulary and melody in defiance of an imperial concept of language, the language of Ozymandias, libraries and dictionaries, law courts and critics, and churches, universities, political dogma, the diction of institutions. Poetry is an island that breaks away from the main.[124]

Walcott's epic poetics retains the defiance and resistance and yet also attempts to fashion a unified and accommodating form. This task is not easy. Despite such statements of intent, in Walcott's work there is an increasingly self-conscious and painful realisation that poetry may fail to heal and reconnect, and worse it may be a cause of further division. Walcott realises that to a certain extent his learning and poetry distances him from the general population. He comments that:

> Language and the experience of illiteracy among the poor is a profound problem that divides the West Indian writer. The more sophisticated he becomes, the more alienated is his mental state. […] When one is confronted with this problem of language, two situations occur: wanting to reach one's people; and realizing the harsh realities of the society, the depression and the economic exploitation. At the

[122] Édouard Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, p. 19.
[123] Édouard Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, p. 19.
[124] Derek Walcott, 'The Antilles: Fragments of Epic Memory', *What the Twilight Says*, p. 70.

> same time that one's intellect becomes refined, and one learns more about the society, there is a movement away from that society.[125]

While his well-received and successful work as a playwright has earned him more popular cultural appeal – it was deliberately fashioned towards a wider audience and expressed a range of linguistic influences and styles – Walcott's position as a poet by virtue of the 'rarefied' medium itself and the expression of a lyric voice has complicated the role of epic spokesman or bard reaching out to a community beyond and 'speaking for an age'.[126] This sense of responsibility intensifies with extended and repeated cycles of travel and return. From being the 'castaway' Walcott becomes the 'fortunate traveller', and then 'prodigal' and also a 'colonial upstart at the end of an empire, | a single circling, homeless satellite'.[127] Each 'exile' and homecoming makes Walcott more acutely aware of his privileged position and increases the desire for community. This need for social connection is a vital touchstone for the authenticity and sincerity of his verse. Whilst Walcott continually feels the 'geographical and spiritual fixity' of St. Lucia, he knows that he is able to travel or even to escape; he feels 'the difference between these poor, dark, very small houses, the people in the streets, and yourself because you always have the chance of taking a plane out'.[128] Global travel splinters connections and threatens a cohesive sense of community, but he

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[125] Derek Walcott, 'Reflections Before and After Carnival', *Conversations*, pp. 39-40. This situation is not so simple. Two anecdotes capture the degree of ambiguity in this debate. First, Walcott in an interview actually defends poetry and its relative importance in Caribbean society by remarking that per capita a book reading in the West Indies might in fact attract a larger crowd than one in New York. Derek Walcott, 'Reflections on *Omeros*', *South Atlantic Quarterly*, 96.2 (Spring 1997), p. 241. Laurence Breiner also notes that in the West Indies poetry retains a primacy (as opposed to the novel) which is unusual due to 'small scale of the society, the close links of many individual poets with political figures, a culture of dramaticality'. Laurence A. Breiner, *Introduction*, p. 13. That said, on the other hand, John Thieme recounts the following joke which 'neatly points up the distance between the native son and his supposed community':

> *Man in bookstore*. Do you have *Omeros*?
> *Young Clerk*. Me? Nah, man, is just this bench too blasted hard make I shifting about so. Is only old people does have omeroids!

John Thieme, *Derek Walcott*, pp. 2-3.

[126] It may be the case that for Walcott other mediums, performance, drama, and painting are able to capture and represent more fully the beauty and immediacy of the island and have a greater ethical intimacy than poetry. Interestingly, in the poetry itself, tropes of building and painting, performance and the speech acts of the everyday are figured as key signifiers of a communality and sometimes are in tension with or counterpoint to the representational limitations of signification in writing. Hence Walcott, strives for a poetry of paradox that undoes itself as artifice and rhetoric, effaces its distance in the visual, the dramatic and the self-reflexive *agon* all while re-connecting and re-instating the bond between the poet and people.

[127] Derek Walcott, 'North and South', *Poetry of Derek Walcott 1948-2013*, p. 287.

[128] Derek Walcott, 'Derek Walcott, 'The Art of Poetry XXXVII, Edward Hirsch (1985)', in *Conversations with Derek Walcott*, pp. 95-121, p. 115.

can never leave permanently and home remains for Walcott an abiding aesthetic and duty-bound moral presence. Using the figure of transport on a bus in which people are jostled together and in close proximity on a daily basis, Walcott tests intimacy and sense of belonging, sometimes finding it wanting:

> I'll continue to come back to see if what I write is not beyond the true experience of the person next to me on the bus – not in terms of talking down to that person, but of sharing that person's pain and strength necessary in those pathetically cruel circumstances in which people have found themselves following the devastations of colonialism.[129]

This socio-economic relation between class and education and its distancing effects has been a recurring theme in Walcott's poetry. It is most acute when he guiltily berates his art for an aestheticisation and romanticisation of poverty. The lesson he must learn (and re-learn) is one which Walcott seems to have faced as early as the poem 'Return to Dennery, Rain'. Here the outsider poet confronts the dilapidation and problems of poverty to which the poet demands of himself some sort of viable response. If only he could summon the 'passionate hatred that would help | The black the despairing, the poor, by speech alone?'[130] However, without the zeal in political protest poetry (it is 'romantic nonsense' which only the 'passionate exiles believe') or even the binding and consoling faith of religion, the poet knows:

> Heaven remains
> Where it is, in the hearts of these people,
> In the womb of the people.[131]

The poet whose 'craft has made, obscuring words and features' concludes in a bitter lament of self-critical self-pity which expresses the loss of artistic hope in its abandonment from the wreck of tradition; he is,

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[129] Derek Walcott, 'Derek Walcott, 'The Art of Poetry', p. 115.
[130] Derek Walcott, 'Return to Dennery, Rain', *Poetry of Derek Walcott 1948-2013*, p. 38.
[131] Derek Walcott, 'Return to Dennery, Rain', Poetry of Derek Walcott 1948-2013, p. 38.

less than they are, for your truth
Consists of a general passion, a personal need,
Like that ribbed wreck, abandoned since your youth,
Washed over by the sour waves of greed.[132]

Walcott continually strives for an 'enlightened' expression. The 'desire for a pristine linguistic universe, the "light beyond metaphor" […] subtends the whole' of *Omeros* as well as his wider poetics which seeks quixotically the 'pristine, unmediated bond with things'.[133] Walcott's fusion of a natural language with the effort of craft – as opposed to sophistry and rhetoric – is paradoxical: it does not efface the labour of the poet, but fuses it with the power of the natural. His expression aims for a clarity that will not be obscured by the vanity of the poet or shadowed with the indulgence of rhetoric and excess, but illuminate the plight and lives of ordinary St. Lucians. This desire is also figured in architectural terms: Walcott wants to house the island. By building with poetic skill, attention to formal qualities, and the virtues of honesty and sincerity, and using natural materials, construct a frame of words in the dialect and language of the island:

A panel of sunrise
on a hillside shop
gave these stanzas
their stilted shape.

If my craft is blest;
if this hand is as
accurate, as honest
as their carpenter's

every frame, intent

[132] Derek Walcott, 'Return to Dennery, Rain', *Poetry of Derek Walcott 1948-2013*, pp. 38-39.
[133] Gregson Davis, '"With no Homeric Shadow": The Disavowal of Epic in Derek Walcott's Omeros' in Special Issue of *South Atlantic Quarterly*, ed. by Gregson Davis, 96.2 (Spring 1997), pp. 321-333, p. 330-331.

on its angles, would
echo this settlement
of unpainted wood

as consonants scroll
off my shaving plane
in the fragrant Creole
of their native grain[134]

But Walcott, who has never been wholly comfortable in the Creole with its 'C's, R's, with a French | or West African root | from a dialect throng- | ing', has to accept he cannot capture the 'exhaling trees [which] refresh | memory with their smell': they hiss:

*What you wish*
*from us will never be,*
*your words is English,*
*is a different tree*.[135]

Over and over again, Walcott painfully confronts the asymmetrical power dynamics in the relationship of language and communal connection: '[w]hatever we learned | at school, like solemn Afro-Greeks eager for grades', he knows that there are 'no rites | for those who have returned' only to be treated like a 'tourist' and finally to 'know there are homecomings without coming home'.[136] Paradoxically, in the poems themselves, Walcott must take responsibility and face the realities of the 'spindly, sugar-headed children' whilst accepting that 'you give them nothing'.[137]

[134] Derek Walcott, 'Cul de Sac Valley', *Poetry of Derek Walcott 1948-2013*, p. 365. For other carpentry poems see Another Life.
[135] Derek Walcott, 'Cul de Sac Valley', p. 366. Walcott's decision to avoid creole is a contentious one which has become embroiled in the cultural politics of representation. Walcott is quite candid about the choice and whether it constitutes a betrayal or failure of poetic communality is moot. See Laurence A. Breiner, 'Creole Language in the Poetry of Derek Walcott' *Callaloo* 28.1 (Winter 2005), pp. 29-41.
[136] Derek Walcott, 'Homecoming: Anse la Raye', *Poetry of Derek Walcott 1948-2013*, pp. 110, 111.
[137] Derek Walcott, 'Homecoming: Anse la Raye', pp. 110, 111.

The most cited and complex instantiation of this dynamic is the poem 'The Light of the World'. The poem which recounts another journey on public transport follows the poet's reminiscences of growing up on the island, and poignantly describes his feeling of disconnection from the islanders as he fears that he has 'abandoned them' and refused their calls, '"Don't leave me stranded." […] "Don't leave me on earth"'.[138] Walcott expresses his anxieties over the virtue and value of his poetic career. He is especially concerned that he is unable to sing righteously of place and people, thereby giving them an inheritance beyond their lives on the earth. He tries desperately to ameliorate this situation through a misguided and overly romanticised erotic desire for intimacy and companionship – he falls 'deeply in love with the woman by the window' and fantasises that he can give her the keys to his house and even 'buy her Benin'.[139] But the poet's reverie to transform her into an aestheticisation of the landscape over whom he can shower indulgent gifts and poetic language is only internal fantasy; he fails to even utter a good night. The ambivalent and conflicted conclusion momentarily resolves this separation, tension and difference through a simple act of naming, gratitude and exchange: after getting off at his stop to stay at the Halcyon Hotel 'full of transients' like himself, the poet is called back by name and a forgotten pack of cigarettes is returned by an unknown fellow bus traveller. The act is enshrined in the poetic act of exchange: the poem's exposition of the 'Light of the World' as thanks for an anonymous act of kindness:

> There was nothing they wanted, nothing I could give them
> but this thing I have called 'The Light of the World.'[140]

The 'longing' for community and an attempt to create it through theatre and poetry is the source both of Walcott's sense of passionate duty and his scepticism.

This ethical-literary tension becomes a cautionary aspect of an epic bard's ability and role, and is especially reflected in *Omeros*'s narrator's personal difficulties and social sense of displacement which complicates the epic task of speaking for and representing St. Lucia and the people in an ethical fashion. By the end of the poem, the very epic conceit which

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[138] Derek Walcott, 'The Light of the World', *Poetry of Derek Walcott 1948-2013*, pp. 383-384.
[139] Derek Walcott, 'The Light of the World', *Poetry of Derek Walcott 1948-2013*, p. 384.
[140] Derek Walcott, 'The Light of the World', *Poetry of Derek Walcott 1948-2013*, p. 385.

made an epic comparison of Helen, Achille, Hector, and Philoctete, is put under self-reflexive scrutiny by the narrator. The method of allusion to epic tradition is found wanting. The epic flounders if it obscures the values of individual independence, the irreducible singularity, or opacity in Glissant's terminology, which resists poetic reification and reduction to an epic code – however aggrandising or dignifying this may be thought to be. Such epic conceits are also found to be insensitive to the joys and trials of the actual socio-economic conditions of life. At best they are extraneous to, at worst parasitic on, the lives of the ordinary St. Lucians. Poetry's relationship with its subjects, especially when they are telescoped through the epic sights, is viewed as a distorting lens through which poverty is sepia-tinted and hued with an idealising ambience which is actually demeaning and in bad faith. After a brief pause for a cigarette during another bus journey, Walcott asks himself the question his poetry has repeatedly asked when faced with the problems of poverty and the difficult questions of modernisation which brings change, employment, and mixed hope, but threatens St. Lucian ways of life:

> I watched the afternoon sea. Didn't I want the poor
> to stay in the same light so that I could transfix
> them in amber, the afterglow of an empire.
>
> preferring a shed of palm-thatch with tilted sticks
> to that blue-bus stop?
> […]
>
> Hadn't I made their poverty my paradise?[141]

In a moving funereal epilogue to *Omeros* which praises the strength and dignity of Achille, Helen, Hector, and Maud, and in which the narrator imagines the death of himself as the poem's final burial and passage, Walcott finally concedes that his epic in many ways has, 'So

[141] Walcott, *Omeros*, p. 227, 228.

much left unspoken | by my chirping nib'.[142] Disavowing the epic,[143] which is figured as the monumentalising and Medusa like gaze of Homer's bust, the narrator, during his katabasis must face the terrible question:

> 'You tried to render
> their lives as you could, but that is never enough;
> now in the sulphur's stench ask yourself this question,
>
> whether a love of poverty helped you
> to use other eyes, like those of that sightless stone?'[144]

It is not just poetic language which is interrogated and questioned, Walcott's scepticism challenges the language and claims of politics, especially its promises to change and address the socio-economic problems of the region. In *Omeros* as much as anywhere in Walcott's work we witness a stinging critique of the abuse and selfish opportunism of political power, the banalisation and obfuscation of political rhetoric, and the sheer absurdity of democratic elections when there is a breakdown of trust and governmental impotence in the face of increased corporate and multinational influence and power. Politicians are condemned to the Malebolge.[145] This is most clearly shown in the satirical representation of the political campaigning and electioneering in the elections. Contested by 'identical factions' labelled 'Marxist' and 'Capitalist', in reality the democratic process is dominated by personality politics: it is just 'two men fighting for one bone' amounting to a 'wasted effort' and is encapsulated by the creole proverb, '*Ciseau pas ça couper del'eau*!'[146] The revolutionary spirits of the islanders are briefly kindled by the jubilant and fiery propaganda of Professor Static who launches the party of United Love to challenge the status quo. The campaign is driven by the street rhetoric of the 'short-circuited prose | of his electrical syntax' which fuses 'Yankee', 'patois', Marxist and worker slogans in a pathetically accurate diagnosis of

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[142] Walcott, *Omeros*, p. 320.
[143] Gregson Davis, '"With no Homeric Shadow": The Disavowal of Epic in Derek Walcott's Omeros' in Special Issue of *South Atlantic Quarterly*, ed. by Gregson Davis, 96.2 (Spring 1997), pp. 321-333.
[144] Walcott, *Omeros*, p. 294.
[145] Walcott, *Omeros*, p. 289-290
[146] Walcott, *Omeros*, p. 104.

the island who may '*look healthy*' but whose '*soul is crying*'.[147] The island heads for '*unqualified* | *disaster*' due to exploitative tourism and is on a

> *free ride*
> *on the Titanic: a cruise back to slavery*
> *in liners like hotels you cannot sit inside*
>
> *except as waiters, maids*.[148]

More party than party as Walcott cynically shows, the enterprise is an entertaining but futile effort in local politics. After the power goes to his head and he parades like the Pope, falsely atones for poverty, Statics disappears as a migrant worker to Florida; the rain drowns out the energy of the politics; and, the episode ends with the distracting noise and entertainment as the '[f]renetic DJs | soared evangelically from the thudding vamp | of the blockorama'.[149] Walcott's political views have been heavily criticised as tending towards apolitical disillusionment and even conservativism.

Given the problems of social cohesion, compounded by the history of colonialism, entangled identities outlined above, the possibility for an epic would seem a futile one. This is especially so when the burden on epic has been towards claims of totality and the expression of the whole of a society through the poet's singular voice. It would be easy for Walcott to renounce the epic completely under the pressure of multiple influences and competing and conflicting cultural demands, but instead he uses the variety to his poetic and creative advantage. As best as he can, notwithstanding his limitations and ethical concerns, Walcott negotiates these multiple identifications and explores a variety of boundaries – community, race, nation, tradition – without relying entirely on one or ascribing absolute value to any. What is more, Walcott highlights the imperfections and constructed and contingent nature of these traditions; they are mutually interdependent and partially invented in the extreme Caribbean condition of amnesia and necessity. He denaturalises them only to re-naturalise them in the domestic experiences of a local hybrid

[147] Walcott, *Omeros*, p. 107.
[148] Walcott, *Omeros*, p. 107.
[149] Walcott, *Omeros*, p. 110.

and living culture. Pollard argues that along with Brathwaite, Walcott has 'probably done more to apprehend and represent the fluidity' of the categories of race, class, tradition primarily 'because of the overlapping and intertwining cultural histories represented in the region'.[150]

In 'What the Twilight Says' Walcott 'seeks to construct an Antillean identity founded on the island's full range of experiences' but he is careful to 'assert that the Caribbean cannot be claimed exclusively by any one of the races that now populate it'.[151] No exclusive narrative of suffering or victimhood preserved in a singular historical experience is adequate legitimation for ownership or rights to the present island's status whether material or cultural. The only ground for unification is that 'we were all strangers here' and no claim for compensation, for revenge, and for special treatment is possible: 'We have no more proprietorship as a race than have the indentured workers from Asia'.[152] Walcott's oeuvre may at times be characterised by a sense of rage and bitterness, but equally the impulse in Walcott's art is towards an articulation of the fragmentation whilst attempting to heal the ruptures. In his valorisation of hybridity and miscegenation, Walcott signals an antipathy to any kind of racial, ethnic or cultural purism.[153] The emphasis will always be on hybridity, relation, and mixed genealogies rather than purity or essentialism of identity. Walcott 'recognizes the widespread fragmentation of his cultural milieu' but he also 'aspires to create a tradition that unites these fragments in new cultural wholes'.[154] Yes, Walcott aligns himself partially with American and British traditions, but this is not exclusive – he writes with smatterings of dialect, represents the everyday life in the Caribbean – and he admits his limitations and weaknesses with respect to other myriad cultures in the Caribbean. Nevertheless, Walcott is able to recuperate and reconstruct an alternative epic tradition, one not solely based on negation of totality or the impossibility of collective vision.

Walcott is keenly aware of the difficulties of such an epic project and he is wary of privileging any one element of Caribbean identity. Walcott, guilty to a certain extent of occlusions, nonetheless, in acknowledging Caribbean diversity has always been cognisant of the dangers of totalising and unifying poetics or politics. Walcott has never laid claim to

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[150] Pollard, *New World Modernisms*, p. 75.
[151] Ogaga Ifowodo, *History, Trauma, and Healing in Postcolonial Narratives*, p. 99.
[152] Derek Walcott, 'What the Twilight Says', p. 10.
[153] Edward Baugh, *Derek Walcott*, p. 14.
[154] Pollard, *New World Modernisms*, p. 76.

represent the Caribbean in its entirety with all its cultural, ethnic, linguistic and historical variety. He makes this explicit in his Nobel Speech when he admits his limitations and failings in this regard:

> I am only one-eighth the writer I might have been had I contained all the fragmented languages of Trinidad.[155]

Overall, this suggests a fragmented and entwined inheritance: a direct line of genealogy is impossible given that the colonial experience is often one of forcible severance of generational ties, intersectional and mixed lineages. Walcott's characters are drawn from the multiple mixed heritages of the island. They are portrayed equally sympathetically with a democratic attempt to hear the range of voices and languages of each in their own dialects and registers as well as their embodied speech acts. In *Omeros* Walcott attempts to find unity in diversity, without compromising either. Throughout *Omeros*, the questions of socio-economic power and its implications in the politics and aesthetics of writing of history, and the creation of the poem itself, are questioned and laid bare. The self-reflexivity of Walcott's epic is seen as the only strategy to avoid the pretentions to universalism without sacrificing intimacies of humanism or domesticating relativism without pursuing the absolutism of identity politics.

When this is added to Walcott's repeated disavowals of epic and his transposition of the epic into the realm of nature and the sea, Walcott humbles the epic impulse to totalise, and instead pursues a more modest epic of intimate, though conflicted, relationships grounded in a sacred place of sublime beauty. The result in *Omeros* is an epic of entanglement and relation. Rather than solely seeking to affirm a specific rooted identity and found a poetics of excluding epic totality, which would inevitably be frustrated by modernity's fragmenting forces and lead to an epic of nihilism and negation, Walcott aspires to a rhizomic participatory epic of relation.[156] In a remarkably similar way to Glissant's

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[155] Derek Walcott, 'The Antilles: Fragments of Epic Memory', *What the Twilight Says*, p. 69.

[156] These are key terms in Glissant's lexicon. To re-cap, he defines them as follows:

> *Root identity*
> – is founded in the distant past in a vision, a myth of the creation of the world;
> – is sanctified by the hidden violence of a filiation that allows a community to proclaim its entitlement to the possession of a land, which thus becomes a territory;

poetics, Walcott's epic renounces the 'excluding epic' as an 'insular mode grounded in ancestral legitimacy, violence and the universalization of a single culture'.[157] *Omeros* seeks to become a 'participatory epic' which 'favours involvement in the world-community and redefines universals in terms of "the finite and infinite quantity of all cultures and all humanities"'.[158] When translating Glissant's definition of the poetics of relation, Eric Prieto helpfully provides us with a model for the ideals, nature and aesthetics of an epic of relation:

> And I call *poetics of relation*, this potential of the imagination that leads us to consider the ungraspable globality of this kind of chaos-monde at the same time that it helps us to pick out details, and in particular to sing of our place.[159]

Since for Glissant the Caribbean as 'one of the explosive regions' is the vanguard of modernity it is 'one of the places in the world where Relation presents itself most visibly' as a 'place of encounter and connivance' and a space of crossings interconnected to a sea that 'diffracts' and that 'explodes the scattered land into an arc'.[160]

In Glissant's terms the modern epic must 'express political consciousness' but not one which is partisan or proselytising, one which 'disengaged from civic frenzy' would 'ground lyricism in a confluence of speech and writing'.[161] The objective of the epic of relation would not be a universalising one which aims for total knowledge thereby subsuming or reifying the manifold singularities and voices of empire's others into History.

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> – is preserved by being projected onto other territories, making their conquest legitimate – and through the project of a discursive knowledge. […]
> *Relation identity*
> – is linked not to a creation of the world but to the conscious and contradictory experience of contacts among cultures;
> – is produced in the chaotic network of Relation and not in the hidden violence of filiation;
> – does not devise any legitimacy as its guarantee of entitlement, but circulates, newly extended;
> – does not think 0f land as territory from which to project toward other territories but as a place where one gives-on-and-with rather than grasps.

Édouard Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, pp. 143-144.

[157] Sneharika Roy, 'Postcolonial Engagements with the Epics: Multiple and Movable Tectonic Plates', *Commonwealth Essays and Studies*, 34.1 (2011), pp. 25-32 (p. 27).

[158] Roy, 'Postcolonial Engagements with the Epics', p. 27.

[159] Édouard Glissant qtd. in Eric Prieto, 'Édouard Glissant, *Litterature-monde*, and *Tout-monde*', *Small Axe*, 33 14.3 (November 2010), pp. 111-120, p. 117.

[160] Édouard Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, pp. 33-34.

[161] Édouard Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, p. 55.

Rather it is 'the confluence of things of the community' (both local and global in relation), which 'without being diminished […] would be the initiation to totality without renouncing the particular'.[162] Likewise Walcott comments in an interview, 'The more particular you get, the more universal you become'.[163] The universal is not homogenising though. It is summed up by Glissant's notion of creolisation or a '*métissage*' defined as a 'new and original dimension allowing each person to be there and elsewhere, rooted and open, lost in the mountains and free beneath the sea, in harmony and errantry'.[164]

At its core, these dilemmas represent an originary and ongoing *agon* in Walcott's poetics and his conflicts of identity and heritage as they revolve around a paradoxical figure: one who is simultaneously abandoned and displaced yet also singing of place and home. Whether he is static, an island spectator, or in motion, travelling and returning, Walcott finds himself as an outsider poet on an island amongst other castaways, in a culture without a centre – the only centre would be the absent centre of the colonial capital, distant and foreboding, and an impossible chimera for the abandoned colonial subject. Again, Glissant describes and develops the condition in a further creative engagement with displacement and difference in the continual movements within the globalised world. The poet of relation is neither conquering voyager on a trajectory from the center to periphery nor an exile returning to an imaginary lost homeland from periphery toward the center. Rather, in the poetics of relation, errancy and exile open the individual to the realisation that the 'poet's

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[162] Édouard Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, p. 55.

[163] Derek Walcott, 'Conversation with Robert D. Hamner (1975)', in *Conversations with Derek Walcott*, ed. William Baer (Jackson: University of Mississippi, 1996), p. 24. We may recall Jones's praise of Joyce who as a cosmopolitan writer also spoke of the local: Joyce was the 'artist who, more than any other, for all the universality of his theme, depended upon a given locality, for no man could have adhered with more absolute fidelity to a specified site, and the complex historic strata special to that site, to express a universal concept. It was from the *particular* that he made the *general* shine out.' David Jones, 'Notes on the 1930s', *Dying Gaul*, p. 46. Walcott also saw this quality in Joyce's writing attributing to him a cosmopolitan mind: 'You'd think that Joyce would have a larger, more continental kind of mind, but Joyce continued insisting on his provinciality at the same time he had the most universal mind since Shakespeare.' Derek Walcott, 'Derek Walcott, 'The Art of Poetry XXXVII, Edward Hirsch (1985)', in *Conversations*, p. 105. This is also implicit in Jones's description of Celtic art's enduring legacy, best exemplified in the work of James Joyce, 'the most creative literary genius of this century'. Joyce provides a model for both writers. For Jones, this is vindication that the 'Dying Gaul is not dead yet'. In a description with which I should imagine Walcott may concur, this is because, 'using English as the *lingua franca* of a megalopolitan civilization' was able to develop 'an art-form showing essential Celticity as intricate, complex, flexible, exact and abstract as anything from the visual arts of La Tène or Kells' or Welsh This represents for Jones the accomplishment of an 'art forged in exile by a man of our placeless cosmopolis, yet an art which, for its *materia poetica*, employs stuff from all the strata and the flux, from before and before again, to weave a word-web, a sound-web'. David Jones, 'The Dying Gaul', *Dying Gaul*, p. 58.

[164] Édouard Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, p. 34.

word leads from periphery to periphery' making 'very periphery into a center' and 'furthermore, it abolishes the very notion of center and periphery'.[165]

To express this postcolonial condition and in his reaction and response to the fragmentations and splits of culture, Walcott, while he continues with a quasi-Romantic aesthetic of sublime experience which is manifested in the adamic elation, increasingly turns to Modernist aesthetics, most specifically T. S. Eliot's ideas on tradition and a range of modernist aesthetic techniques (both poetic and novelistic) to develop a complex and ambivalent response to tradition, and more fundamentally to history.[166] Through these multiple lines of inquiry, Walcott's common theme remains: a desire for the intimate and personal engagement with the epic creating a hybrid form which makes history personal, makes the public intimate to the private and ordinary, and sacralises and humanises monuments, traditions and historical spaces which have previously been distanced in terms of colonial power.

**Adamic imagination and the epic of island place**

To return to a critical image in Walcott's intellectual and artistic corpus, Walcott represents the epic poet as a New World Adam in his own Eden, a griot-bard surveying a landscape ignored, overlooked, and regarded as an empty nothingness in which apparently nothing great could be achieved or built. The most famous and egregious example of such sentiment comes not from a colonial conqueror, missionary, or traveller, of which there are

[165] Édouard Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, p. 29.

[166] The categorisation of Walcott's work tends towards three main movements: the Romantic, Modernist and Post-modern. While I am not invested in any exclusive reading of Walcott, as I believe his elusive and capacious poetic method to be uniquely Caribbean first and foremost, and subtle and supple enough to accommodate many versions, I am more sympathetic to the arguments of Charles Pollard and Maeve Tynan who associate Walcott with a modernist or late modernist poetics. Pollard foregrounds Eliot in this relationship, while Tynan focuses on Joyce and Romare Bearden. Other connections are also possible. Yeats may be one, which has been commented on. The complex relationship between postcolonialism and modernism in both critics is helpfully nuanced so as to avoid the assumptions first of a predominance of metropolitan modernism at the expense of peripheral modernism in a negative relationship of antagonism. This move ultimately pluralises modernism into modernisms interacting with each other across cultures and temporal frames and stresses the transnational exchange and translation of modernism. (Jahan Ramazani is particularly convincing in this regard.) Second, such criticism usefully highlights the productive exchange through which modernism was received and re-read in the Caribbean, and thereby actively altered and transformed the metropolitan forms or in Raymond Williams's terms 'structures of feeling' which have long assumed to constitute a singular and foundational version of modernism.

many and Anthony Froude the originator,[167] but Trinidadian-born writer V. S. Naipaul, who caustically stated, 'History is built around achievement and creation; and nothing was created in the West Indies'.[168] This response to the apparent state of West Indian life stems from the perceived value of History which is based solely on Western values of achievement. Walcott summarises, 'since the history of the Antilles was so genetically corrupt, so depressing in its cycles of massacres, slavery, and indenture, a culture was inconceivable' all of which led the negative conclusion that, 'nothing could ever be created in those ramshackle ports, those monotonously feudal sugar estates'.[169] The reverberations of this condemnation were felt throughout West Indian letters as writers sought to respond and challenge such a pessimistic view. And for Walcott, as Edward Baugh notes, '"Nothing" has been a central theme' in which he has 'sought to transform it imaginatively from a stigma of non-achievement and hopelessness to an inviting challenge and opportunity, a blank page on which there is everything to be written'.[170] This meant in part that writers and others were not looking properly, listening carefully enough, and attending to the sites of beauty and fecundity of creation closely. More radically, Walcott also suggests that there is a resistance and even blithely independent existence to such measures of achievement found in the landscape and speech of the people. Not 'only the light and salt of Antillean mountains defied' the supposed nothingness, but so did the 'demotic vigor and variety of their inhabitants'.[171] Rather than obsessively and bitterly lamenting a persistent privation and loss, or becoming embroiled in a politics and poetics of ongoing *ressentiment*, negation

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[167] 'There has been romance, but it has been the romance of pirates and outlaws. The natural graces of life do not show themselves under such conditions. There are no people there in the true sense of the word, with a character and purpose of their own.' Anthony Froude, *The Bow of Ulysses*, qtd. in Derek Walcott, 'What the Twilight Says', pp. 16-17.

[168] V. S. Naipaul, *The Middle Passage* (London: Picador, 2011), p. 20. Naipaul may be defended as making a specifically historiographical point about how a historian may properly approach the futility and brutality of West Indies, which for so many centuries had a historical record based only it seems on exploitation and slavery in the plantation system. Neither the generalising historical view equally apportioning explanations of pain and exploitation across a wider context of European colonisation (i.e. a world-system historical approach) nor evaluating national responsibility and defending each (i.e. a history of nationalist, patriotic sensibility) will do. The West Indian historian cannot lay claim to any objectivity and detachment in the face of such horrors either. However, despite such scepticism, it seems the pessimistic answer Naipaul offers – that 'the history of the islands can never be satisfactorily told' – and especially when its extends across cultural spheres, presumptuously assumes that there was no culture, no resistance, and nothing other than the enforced exploitation condemning the West Indies to peripheral mediocrity and insignificance.

[169] Derek Walcott, 'The Antilles: Fragments of Epic Memory', in *What the Twilight Says: Essays* (London: Faber and Faber, 1998), p. 76.

[170] Edward Baugh, *Derek Walcott* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 8.

[171] Derek Walcott, 'The Antilles: Fragments of Epic Memory', p. 76.

and retribution, Walcott continually turns the condition of nothingness into a positive yet paradoxical affirmation of the condition of emptiness. In one of his most important theoretical essays, Walcott replies directly to Naipaul – he called him 'V . S. Nightfall' in sardonic poetic riposte[172] – by affirming nothing as a value, not the sense of 'anthropological absurdity' or 'pseudo philosophical rubbish', but revels in West Indian creative difference:

> Precisely, precisely. We create nothing [and, because] Nothing will always be created in the West Indies, for quite a long time, because what will come out of there is like nothing one has ever seen before.[173]

Despite affliction and hardship, there remain opportunities of freshness, newness, and joyful creation: 'If there was nothing, there was everything to be made. With this prodigious ambition one began'.[174] Walcott even asserts that nothing is the rightful basis of all culture as in fact, 'cultures can only be created out of this knowledge of nothing, and in deeper than the superficial, existential sense, we in the Caribbean know all about nothing'.[175] This nothingness is turned into freedom from history and (controversially, given our current reparative zeitgeist) from debt and guilt:

> We know that we owe Europe either revenge or nothing, and it is better to have nothing than revenge. We owe the past revenge or nothing, and revenge is uncreative.[176]

Resolutely facing the sea, described by Walcott as History itself, and which is evocative of the abyss of amnesia, the history of losses and scars of collective traumas of dispossession, enslavement and continued colonial oppression, Walcott invokes a second Adam with an exuberant and defiant desire to rename and remake a poetry from his natural surroundings.

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[172] Walcott, 'The Spoiler's Return', *Poetry of Derek Walcott 1948-2013*, p. 304.
[173] Derek Walcott, 'The Caribbean: Culture or Mimicry? (1974)' in *Critical Perspectives on Derek Walcott*, ed. by Robert D. Hamner (Boulder: Lynne Reinner, 1996), pp. 51-57, p. 55.
[174] Walcott, 'What the Twilight Says', p. 4.
[175] Derek Walcott, 'The Caribbean: Culture or Mimicry? (1974)', p. 57.
[176] Derek Walcott, 'The Caribbean: Culture or Mimicry? (1974)', p. 57.

Beginning with the figure of Adam who had the power to name in the paradise of Eden, Walcott ascribes to the Caribbean artist a poetics of 'awe of the numinous, this elemental privilege of naming the New World'.[177] The source of such an image is quasi-theological as much as it is expressive of an elation in natural beauty with its ability to regenerate and regrow. At its most hopeful, this vision evokes the power of language to shape and reveal the world in a vatic mode which carries social promise to the people of St. Lucia:

> What would deliver him from servitude was the forging of a language that went beyond mimicry, a dialect which had the force of revelation as it invented names for things.[178]

This task of epic naming and renaming involves a process of negotiating the vicissitudes and suffering of race and empire which has left indelible marks and scars. Burdened by the legacy of centuries of multiple foreign occupations, enslaved displacement and dislocation, communities have had to reconstitute themselves in a new and strange, but enticing and alluring island. This colonial condition forces the epic poet as Adam to create in an environment of abundance within a legacy of oblivion, fractured diversity, and threatened continual erasure:

> My race began as the sea began,
> with no nouns, and with no horizon,
> with pebbles under my tongue,
> with a different fix on the stars. […]
>
> Behind us all the sky is folded,
> as history folds over a fishline,
> and the foam foreclosed
> with nothing in our hands

[177] Derek Walcott, 'The Muse of History', in *What the Twilight Says: Essays* (London: Faber and Faber, 1998), p. 40.
[178] Walcott, 'What the Twilight Says', p. 15.

but this stick
to trace our names on the sand
which the sea erased again, to our indifference.[179]

The experience can be harrowing and demanding. To encapsulate the difficulty and necessarily painful nature of this deliverance, Walcott invokes the process of healing through cauterization: 'The children of slaves must sear their memory with a torch'.[180] The torturous history of slavery and branding needs an equally brave resilience in order to rebrand and recreate despite the trauma of the past.

This quest to name is literary and aesthetic – and it need not always be a trial of agony. It expresses the challenge of marking, mapping and ascribing value to St. Lucia which had been at best ignored and at worst wilfully and violently erased and obscured through colonialism. Yes, this is an historical injustice, but Walcott, elevating himself to pioneer status, as originator responds with the excitement of being able to put down in words and print the textures and sounds of the place for the very first time. He is involved in the creation of a national literature in a newly independent postcolonial nation as the sun set on the British empire. For him there can be 'no better beginning' and the poetics of 'metaphor' more than just a 'symbol' but a living dialogue with the past, in a 'conversation' in which Walcott accepts that 'every poet begins with such ignorance, in the anguish that every noun will be freshly, resonantly named'.[181] When Walcott claims that, 'We were blest with a virginal, unpainted world | with Adam's task of giving things their names'[182] he attempts to find an elemental source of artistic wonder in the Caribbean and ground this poetics in the landscape and history of place. He recounts this with a fervour reformed from religion and discovered in an immanent vision of the landscape of St. Lucia and people:

The Church upheld the Word, but this new Word

[179] Derek Walcott, 'Names', in *The Poetry of Derek Walcott*, pp. 207-208.
[180] Walcott, 'What the Twilight Says', p. 5.
[181] Walcott, 'What the Twilight Says', p. 15. In an interview with Edward Hirsch, Walcott recollects this feeling:
> I'm forty-seven now, and I can still remember the tremendous elation I had at eighteen just standing on a little hill somewhere and looking at the sea and the sky and the town, knowing that nobody had really written about this. It was exhilarating to know that I was privileged to be the first one to put down the names of a certain town, or fisherman, or road – a privilege very few writers ever have.

[182] Walcott, 'Another Life', 23.IV.3626-7, p. 152.

> was here, attainable
> to my own hand,
> in the deep country it found the natural man,
> generous, rooted.[183]

Walcott's epic concentrates on simple private domestic and everyday tasks as well as the shadow of history which extends across centuries of public events. He blends a personal and a collective or communal exploration of place and the rhythms of daily and longer stretches of time. Amnesia and loss are transmuted into freshness and beginnings. In his Nobel Prize Speech, with gratitude for the gift of place that the Antilles bestowed on him, Walcott describes the adamic imagination in the familiar language of the sea and especially the light of sunrise:

> For every poet it is always morning in the world. […] There is a force of exultation, a celebration of luck, when a writer finds himself witness to the early morning of a culture that is defining itself, branch by branch, leaf by leaf, in that self-defining dawn, which is why, especially at the edge of the sea, it is good to make a ritual of the sunrise.[184]

By appropriating the figure of Adam in an Eden and extending this persona as trait into the characters in *Omeros* – all of whom are capable of adamic vision[185] and engaged in different ways in the craft of adamic re-creation – Walcott pursues a communal epic which 'reject[s] ethnic ancestry for faith in elemental man'. [186] Such a 'political philosophy rooted in elation

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[183] Walcott, 'Another Life', 7.I.979-983, p. 42.
[184] Derek Walcott, 'The Antilles: Fragments of Epic Memory', in *What the Twilight Says: Essays* (London: Faber and Faber, 1998), p. 79.
[185] In terms of the capitalisation of 'Adam', I follow George Handley's distinction between the two forms. See below. Handley defines the aim of an 'adamic' imagination as the 'delicate but necessary balance of acknowledging the force of New World history but also embracing the newness of a New World poetics'. He differentiates this from an Adamic imagination which is 'problematic' in its 'tendency to dismiss or simplify the colonial history of American lands or to downplay the neo-colonial gestures implicit in its urge to name the world for the first time' and should be criticised as it 'yearns for purity and innocence and facilely dismisses the claims of history'. George Handley, *New World Poetics: Nature and the Adamic Imagination of Whitman, Neruda, and Walcott* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2007), p. 2.
[186] Walcott, 'Muse of History', p. 40.

would have to accept belief in a second Adam, the re-creation of the entire order, from religion to the simplest domestic rituals'.[187]

Of course, the figure of Adam is not without precedent, and indeed it obviously carries a complex and entangled set of religious, mythopoeic and literary associations. Whether Walcott's source is drawn specifically from soteriological Biblical interpretation which posited the genealogical typology of Adam related to Christ as second Adam, or from the literary works of the New England American Renaissance which critics (most notably R. W. B. Lewis) argued granted American colonials heroic stature with the second chance to restore the empty paradise of the Americas, Walcott's use of this figure takes an ecumenical and creolised form, thereby negotiating with complex and potentially troublesome ideas and tropes.[188] Consideration of the aspects and implications of the sacred, mythopoeic and archetypal, and the cultural politics of the idea of Adam serve to adumbrate and foreshadow the central concerns and paradoxes inherent in Walcott's bardic and epic vision as it is finally matured in *Omeros*. Most of all it illustrates Walcott's desire and ambition for a poetic power to create an epic and the search for the authority and legitimacy of a fresh voice.

If a strain of Walcott's Adam emerges from the idea of an origin rooted in Judaeo-Christian belief it inevitably calls for acknowledgment of original sin and the fall. As a consequence, throughout his poetry, plays, and essays Walcott accentuates the tragic and sacrificial aspects of suffering, expulsion and loss intrinsic to the human experience in a fallen world. In *Omeros*, this sense of sin and pain is manifest in the theme of wounding and healing. Walcott acknowledges the curse of suffering not only of his native island characters but ex-patriate colonials alike. Philoctete, the closest to the Adam figure, carries a physical and ontological wound, an anchor shaped scar on his shin. Its aetiology is directly attributed to the transgenerational trauma of slavery and continued poverty:

> He believed the swelling came from the chained ankles
> of his grandfathers. Or else why was there no cure?

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[187] Walcott, 'Muse of History', p. 40.

[188] For more on the religious implications of Walcott's poetics see below. The literary influence of adamic poetics has been widely commented on, most thoroughly by George Handley, *New World Poetics: Nature and the Adamic Imagination of Whitman, Neruda, and Walcott* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2007). See also Paul Breslin, *Nobody's Nation*, pp. 102-126; Paula Burnett, *Derek Walcott*, pp. 114-119.

That the cross he carried was not only the anchor's

but that of his race, for a village black and poor
as the pigs that rooted in its burning garbage,
then were hooked on anchors of the abattoir.[189]

But the other characters also suffer from wounds and painful losses most often bound up with love and expressed in bodily anguish. Achille loses Helen to Hector. He,

believed that he smelt as badly as Philoctete
from the rotting loneliness.[190]

Hector, who despite his success in the romance realises the insecurity of Helen's love, and Helen still pines after Achille. Indeed, the entire fishing community feels the tremors of love as a wound when the life of the seas presents its seasonal challenges in the ongoing need for sustenance. Registered in a concrete physical love for the sea itself over any national abstraction or political affliction, this love is,

in each face
by the cracking sparks there was that obvious wound
made from loving the sea over their own country.[191]

So central is the presence of pain – quite in contrast to any glib notion of St. Lucia as a blissful second paradise – that Walcott's narrator directly signals the importance of it in his first metafictional intervention. When describing his ex-pat colonial Major Plunkett who suffers from head trauma received in World War II in his North African campaign, the narrator says:

This wound I have stitched into Plunkett's character.

[189] Walcott, *Omeros*, p. 19.
[190] Walcott, *Omeros*, p. 116.
[191] Walcott, *Omeros*, p. 302.

> He has to be wounded, affliction is one theme
> of this work […].[192]

The theme of wounding has been recognised as a plural site of wide ranging significances. In stitching or creating characters with a variety of wounds, Walcott sutures and heals – another form of necessary cauterising – by bringing together different stories and sufferings in the text. The wound is an intersectional 'figurative site' for concerns such as 'imperial injury, literary archetype, and linguistic heritage' so that it becomes rich '[h]ybrid, polyvalent, and unpredictable in its knitting together of different histories of affliction' through which Walcott 'crosses and recrosses lines of race, nation, and gender'.[193] The healing process carried out by Ma Kilman who is an obeah figure representing the synthetic religious nature of West Indian society is the culmination of the adamic. Drawn from the natural products of the island, and perfected with the seed from the sacrifice of the swift, the source of the cure is the very anguish and pain of the island's history renamed.

For Walcott, the 'idea of Adam contains original sin'.[194] So, if Adam is not represented as unambiguously good, then neither is St. Lucia an untainted Eden. Both person and place cannot extricate themselves from the prevailing sins of domination and exploitation. Neither Adam nor the paradise space is a source or origin of pure genesis. Walcott's return to such archetypal material does not mean we should be seduced by a beauty which is passive and to be consumed by tourist or poet. The people and land are marked by the sins of abuse and destruction. The wounds are generational, collective and personal, implying ongoing transgression and transmission which results in unavoidable complicity, guilt, and responsibility. In the middle collection, *Sea Grapes* (1976), Adam is linked conspiratorially with the serpent engaged in despoiling the Eden of the New World after the horrors of the fall of the Middle Passage and the arrival on the island paradise:

> Then after Eden,

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[192] Walcott, *Omeros*, p. 28.
[193] Jahan Ramazani, 'The Wound of Postcolonial History: Derek Walcott's *Omeros*', in *The Hybrid Muse: Postcolonial Poetry in English* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2001), pp. 50-51, p. 68.
[194] Derek Walcott, '"The Argument of the Outboard Motor": An Interview with Derek Walcott with George B. Handley' in *Caribbean Literature and the Environment: Between Nature and Culture*, eds. by Elizabeth DeLoughrey, Renée K. Gosson, and George B. Handley (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2005), pp. 127-139, p. 133.

was there one surprise?
O yes, the awe of Adam
at the first bead of sweat.
Thenceforth, all flesh
had to be sown with salt, […]

So when Adam was exiled
to our New Eden, in the ark's gut,
the coined snake coiled there for good
fellowship also; that was willed.

Adam had an idea.
He and the snake would share
the loss of Eden for a profit.
So both made the New World. And it looked good.[195]

The suggestions of such verse are no doubt controversial, implicating Africans and traders in a collusion of commodification and exploitation of the New World in a plantation culture that dehumanises labour and debases nature reducing it to production and profit. Such a view is made explicit in Walcott's treatment of the brutal ravages of slavery in *Omeros* where Achille's experience in his African return shows that Africans colluded and engaged in slaving raids.[196] Although heavily criticised, Walcott is determined to avoid apportioning guilt and blame of the tragedies of the past singly on a particular race.[197] Leaving the thorny politics of the responsibility for slavery and its retribution and restitution aside, which, I

[195] Derek Walcott, 'New World' in *Collected Poems 1948-1984* (London: Faber and Faber, 1992), pp. 300-301.
[196] Derek Walcott, *Omeros* (London: Faber and Faber, 1990), pp. 144-148.
[197] In an interview Walcott addresses the politicisation of suffering and criticising a culture of black victimhood which would absolve responsibility of African population in colluding in the slave trade: 'Oh no, the whole idea of slavery was that you caught people and sold them to the white man. That is the real beginning; that is what should be taught. So what do you say? Do you say slavery is wrong regardless of its color? The people who sold African and West Indians as slaves were Africans. That's a reality that is not often told. We dramatize the idea of slavery by saying there's a slave ship outside and somehow these guys get out into the jungle or whatever, and then they capture these poor people and put them on the ship. That is not true. What happened was, one tribe captured another tribe. That's is the history of the world.' Derek Walcott, 'Thinking Poetry: An Interview with Derek Walcott. Robert Brown and Cheryl Johnson (1990)' in *Conversations with Derek Walcott*, p. 179.

think, Walcott somewhat misconceives (how could the slaves conceivably share the profits of the New World venture?), Walcott will often universalise historical atrocity and connect episodes of extreme human violence in order to portray a series of shared human catastrophes. He suggests that his theatre expresses the 're-enactment of remorse for the genocides of civilization, a search for the tragic joy in ritual, a confession of aboriginal calamity'.[198]

*Omeros* sensitively reveals the interconnected losses and genocide of Native Americans, the holocaust and the native Arawaks and Caribs on a continuum of human cruelty and violence. This is most directly revealed through the narrator's journeys through North America, but importantly intimation of the genocide and devastation of inhabitants of the island is transmitted through an interaction between Achille and Seven Seas in the activity of clearance of the forest and cultivation of Seven Sea's plot of land. In a tutelary scene during which Seven Seas, the Homer figure, teaches Achille the relevance and significance of names of the trees, Achille clears the leaves of the pomme-Arac and hears the leaves '[t]hrough the teeth of the rake […] talk a dead language'.[199] Interested in the transitory nature of existence and the origin of names, he asks Seven Seas the blind Homer figure, who relates the etymology:

> '*Aruac* mean the race
> that burning there like leaves and *pomme* is the word
> in patois for 'apple.' This used to be their place.'[200]

Hidden in the creolised linguistic form is the history of a lost tribe which is itself located in the landscape through the cyclical natural flowering and foliage of a tree. It is also signalled by the unnerving presence of the iguana. Disturbingly Achille turfs a relic of Aruac culture and continues to unwittingly, perhaps necessarily for adamic survival, burn the leaves:

> A beach burns their memory. Copper almond leaves

[198] Walcott, 'What the Twilight says', p. 6. The phrase 'aboriginal calamity' is Cardinal Newman's. Walcott acknowledges and discusses the implication of this view of the human condition in an interview with J. P. White. See Derek Walcott, 'An Interview with J. P. White (1990)', in *Conversations with Derek Walcott*, p. 154.
[199] Walcott, *Omeros*, p. 162.
[200] Walcott, *Omeros*, p. 163.

> cracking like Caribs in a pepper smoke, the blue
> entering God's eye and nothing raked from their lives
>
> except one elegy from Aurac to Sioux.[201]

This action represents the extremity of Walcott's anti-historical vision. Controversial as it is, it suggests a desire for freedom from history. Walcott, however can be criticised for this potentially callous disregard for the island's rare artefacts, and it reflects a blindspot in his career, which tended to downplay the possibility of the recovery of historic traces from the past, to serve a more aesthetic point about the mythologised nature of history, and a political point against pan-African idealisations of lost, rooted cultures. However, Walcott still employs a recurring motif and pun playing on the memories and remains of the dead as fallen leaves and the textual leaves of the pages of histories and of his poetic writing which eulogises them. As Joe Moffett points out the image has its antecedents in the Homeric lines from the *Iliad* which suggest the life and death of humans in terms of the seasons of trees:

> Like the generations of leaves, the lives of mortal men.
> Now the wind scatters the old leaves across the earth,
> now the living timber bursts with the new buds
> and spring comes round again. And so with men:
> as one generation comes to life, another dies away.[202]

Unlike Homer, however, Walcott describes the elemental condition of his adamic character Achille, who in his simple and precarious labour, burns the relics and remnants of the past which either blinds God or serves to obscure the vision of him. Our pleas for Divine meaning, consolation, and restitution are rendered smoky and insubstantial. Moffett argues that the image of 'leaves symbolizing the dead' is a 'means of exploring the loss of knowledge of the past that marks the postcolonial situation' so that the motif is 'viewed as

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[201] Walcott, *Omeros*, p. 164.
[202] Homer, *Iliad*, cited in Joe Moffett, 'The Leaf Motif in Derek Walcott's *Omeros*', *Explicator*, 71.1 (2013), pp. 3-6, p.4.

an homage to Homer' and the epic poets, and on the other represents a critique of 'the long-term effects of imperialism and colonization'.[203] Moffett does not stress the implicit metafictional and self-referential connection strongly enough. The raking (or writing) amounts to nothing – except the poem which is an epic transmuted into elegy for the losses of tribes and peoples across history. Walcott paradoxically suggests the suffering of the past with the fragility of its expression; the losses of tribes and their memory somehow endures in the seasonal falling of leaves, what Walcott elsewhere terms the 'muttering shales' of trees and rock.[204] *Pace* History or other human discourses, the poetics of nature speaks the human losses of the past, but subsumes it in a hidden and enigmatic language which is integrated into the cycles of growth, decay and regeneration – a cycle indifferent to the demands of humans for justice or retribution. In *Another Life* Walcott reveals his vision of an entangled jungle environment resistant to and dissolving rational and institutionalised efforts to construct systems of knowledge and meaning:

> Miasma, acedia, the enervations of damp
> As the teeth of the mould gnaw,
> […]
> Let the historian go mad there
> From thirst.
> […]
> The astigmatic geologist
> Stoops, with the crouch of the heron,
> deciphering – not a sign.
> All of the epics are blown away with the leaves,
> blown with the careful calculations on brown paper;
> these were the only epics: the leaves.[205]

[203] Joe Moffett, 'The Leaf Motif in Derek Walcott's *Omeros*', *Explicator*, 71.1 (2013), pp. 3-6, p. 5.
[204] This is intrinsically a 'natural' language of local dialect the poet speaks hears and tries to capture, often in vain, in writing. Walcott's 'leaves of poetry come from Caribbean (colonial), not European (imperial centre), trees' and they 'declaim […] like the muttering shale' that they will be a 'language made anew'. Cashman Kerr Prince, 'A Divided Child, or Derek Walcott's Post-Colonial Philology' in *Classics in Post-Colonial Worlds*, ed. by Lorna Hardwick and Carol Gillespie (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 175.
[205] Walcott, 'Another Life', (22.I.3318-3319, 3329-3330, 3357-3362), pp. 142-143.

The primeval scene of a return to a landscape of formation and a genesis alluded to in the figure of Adam serves to 'disrupt rather than affirm myths of origin' and so reveals 'the entanglement of history and memory' all the while trying to use these myths to 'redress historical forms of violent consumption of people, resources, and ecological terrains in the region'.[206]

Furthermore, while Walcott's re-inscription of the Adamic and Eden myth on one level suggests the possibility of naming and renaming, on another he acknowledges the impossibility of names to define or control nature. There can be no permanent, authoritative and final translation of nature into culture and inscription of immutable meaning into a monumental space. This is a continual struggle to make habitable. To continue a belief would be merely to perpetuate imperial tropes of colonial conquest and ownership through subversion of nature and domination of reason and language.

Similarities to Glissant's poetics are crucial in our understanding of the dynamics of New World poetics characterised by constant metamorphosis, multiplicity and diversity as opposed to a static, changeless perfection. When Michael Dash introduces Glissant's *Caribbean Discourse*, he comments that Glissant's portrayal of Martinique's landscape emphasises the resistant, opaque, polysemic nature of Caribbean landscapes and languages. He writes that this is the realm of the 'unsayable where infinite metamorphosis prevails' so that:

> It is the direct opposite of 'the Eternal garden.' Here no Creator provides the text that makes this world intelligible, and perhaps there is no Creator for Adam to ape. The problem for the New World Adam is how to inhabit such a world, which in the past has defeated all who tried to possess it.[207]

In what Glissant refers to as di-genesis, the history and myth of the Caribbean cannot be traced back to a pure root or single origin – and hence, cannot be reconstituted simply

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[206] Jana Evans Braziel, '"Caribbean Genesis" Language, Gardens, Worlds (Jamaica Kincaid, Derek Walcott, Édouard Glissant)' in *Caribbean Literature and the Environment*, pp. 110-125, p. 122, p. 111.
[207] J. Michael Dash, 'Introduction' to Édouard Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse*, trans. by J. Michael Dash (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1989), p. xxxvi.

through a total poetics of direct legitimacy and lineage.[208] Rather, the new world epic must re-tell its origin story as one borne in rupture and fragmentation. Relation is preferred to possession. In Walcott's words about the adamic this means that:

> Geographically and historically, the Caribbean origin is of slavery and indenture. It is not escape from history to go into a kind of Edenic or blissful geography in which then you don't owe anybody anything and you are not responsible to anyone – that's not the idea of it.[209]

Walcott's idea of Adam and the New World is caught between binaries of good and evil, utopia and dystopia. Lloyd Brown encapsulates this position arguing that 'new beginnings, the promise of a re-created order of things' is countered with the 'brooding suspicion that the new possibilities have been betrayed in that historical process which destroyed the dreams of Che, and before him, groups like the Cheyennes'.[210]

As far as St. Lucia as a paradise is concerned Walcott faces everyday reality of life on the island, and disavows a utopian return to a paradise or state of innocence. This is no mythical world of perfection. The adamic attitude of exuberance and elation which is characterised by sublime moments of epiphany in the landscape does not mean the erasure of or a turning away from the sometimes-abject state of St. Lucia For instance, Walcott acknowledges the bare and harsh reality of a pervasive atmosphere of futility and nothingness which is a result not only of colonial oppression, but also especially, natural forces. Amnesia and loss are as much a result of the perpetration of colonial conquest and violence as it is the consequence of the twin process of natural growth and decay. Despite finding joy in nature, Walcott never idealises it. Nor does he erase the hardship and poverty around him. Nature can be indifferent and hostile to humans. In the poem 'Air' nature is inimical to human culture regardless of whether it proclaims itself as glorious or is deemed barbaric. Nature destroys any traces or vestiges of civilisation as it 'eats gods', the Caribs and Arawak, and ultimately forgets them:

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[208] Haleh Zargarzadeh, 'Rhiz(h)oming Achille: Walcott, Glissant, and the Politics of Relation and Creolization', *Journal of Postcolonial Writing* (16 May 2017), pp. 1-14.
[209] Derek Walcott, '"The Argument of the Outboard Motor"', p. 135.
[210] Lloyd W. Brown, 'Caribbean Castaway New World Odyssey: Derek Walcott's Poetry', *Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, 11.2 (1976), pp. 149-159, (p. 150).

> The unheard, omnivorous
> jaws of this rain forest
> not merely devour all,
> but allow nothing vain;
> they never rest,
> grinding their disavowal
> of human pain […]
>
> There is too much nothing here.[211]

By acknowledging the indifferent, all-consuming force of natural processes which would reduce human history to nothing, Walcott puts his epic aspirations into perspective. While Terada argues that this 'desire to place genocide in a natural context flirts with resignation', Walcott is in fact acknowledging both pain and human loss but setting it in the context of an indifferent natural process.[212] Far from blindly 'writing of erasure and erasing history himself' this suggests an attitude of humility which goes beyond the vainglorious foundational impulses of an epic that would yearn for and proclaim immortality.[213] This is a poetics of innocence and experience, and Walcott fuses the two:

> The great poetry of the New World does not pretend to such innocence, its vision is not naïve. Rather, like its fruits, its savour is a mixture of the acid and the sweet, the apples of its second Eden have the tartness of experience. In such poetry there is bitter memory and it is the bitterness that dries last on the tongue. It is the acidulous that supplies its energy.[214]

Similarly, on a communal level, Walcott refuses to ignore bitter social deprivations and render the island in paradisal poetic details akin to the postcards of the tourist industry. This

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[211] Walcott, *The Poetry of Derek Walcott*, pp. 106-7.
[212] Terada, *Derek Walcott's Poetry*, p. 162.
[213] Terada, *Derek Walcott's Poetry*, p. 162.
[214] Walcott, 'The Muse of History', pp. 40-41.

sets up an ongoing tension inherent in his entire oeuvre: the dilemma of true elation in the place and atmosphere of St. Lucia and the painful realisation of past and present struggles with poverty, suffering, and violence. Adam is both visionary and 'unaccommodated man' in a world of excess and scarcity. Walcott remains aware of the dangers of romanticising his home, and indeed the false and illusory solution of any return to a pure place or golden age. Walcott directly represents the harsh realities of colonial life. His characters and poetic figures are an 'extreme representation of what colonialism can do to a man – he is reduced to an almost animal-like state of degradation'.[215] Paul Breslin notes that for Walcott, the West Indian Adam is 'unfallen in his primal, unselfconscious bond with the world around him and in his ability to name and possess that world', but he is also 'fallen' and 'he knows that he is poor and must work hard to survive, and he cannot help knowing something of the islands' bitter history of colonization and slavery'.[216]

To illustrate this, the fishermen in *Omeros* embody the values and dignity of labour. They are not idle, despite being prone to periods of drunkenness and desperation in the 'empty season'.[217] Their lives are precarious and require skill and tenacity, often for little reward. For Walcott, this effort is noble and heroic. He portrays their prowess in language which is lyrical, muscular, and redolent of the rhythms of the daily interactions sailing out to sea. The rocking and energy of the ocean as the fisherman are hauling the canoes into the surf is suggested by the enjambment countered and regulated by the alliterative sounds but drawn forward and outward by the onward movement of effort of the rhymes. The metaphor of horsemanship, epic and regal in its associations, is detailed with streaming manes and tensile muscle movement visually cued with crashing waves and bobbing boats:

> The fisherman brushed the palms. Now all the canoes
>
> were riding the pink morning swell. They drew their bows
> gently, the way grooms handle horses in the sunrise,
> flicking the ropes like reins, pinned them by the nose –

[215] Derek Walcott, 'Man of the Theatre. The New Yorker 1971' in *Conversations with Derek Walcott*, p. 18.
[216] Paul Breslin, *Nobody's Nation: Reading Derek Walcott* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2001), p. 118.
[217] Walcott, *Omeros*, p. 302.

> *Praise Him*, *Morning Star*, *St. Lucia*, *Light of My Eyes*,
> threw bailing tins in them, and folded their bodies across
> the titling hulls, then sculled one oar in the slack
>
> of the stern.[218]

In this passage Walcott subtly writes back to Froude, both through the use of the word 'bow', but more importantly by giving the men a living presence and stature. The power of adamic renaming is clear in the boat's names. Their names, hybrids and polyvalent, resonate in a fresh context, carrying the religious connotations of praise, the surety of celestial guidance and maritime orientation, the island itself named after Saint Lucy and the light of poetic vision, suggesting the biblical Light of the World. Achille's canoe, misspelt *In God we Troust*, adds particular individuality and creolises dictum.[219] This is precisely where Walcott places the epic strength through adversity and change: in the resilience of ordinary being, activity, and names. This is a strength, not of grand conquests, but of 'the visible poetry of the Antilles' embodied in survival:

> I am not recreating Eden; I mean, by 'the Antilles,' the reality of light, of work, of survival. Survival is the triumph of stubbornness, and spiritual stubbornness, a sublime stupidity, is what makes the occupation of poetry endure, when there are so many things that should make it futile.[220]

In *Omeros*, survival is the source of strength and power given to the epic, and echoing Quint and Glissant, it is the mode's ultimate value carried across the ultimate abyss of the Middle Passage:

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[218] Walcott, *Omeros*, p. 10-11.
[219] There are several connotations here too as the name recalls the official motto of the United States of America, and perhaps, more ironically, the fact that it is inscribed on the currency. Don Barnard glosses the spelling as Achille's act of 'rejection of the tourist culture and determination to make his living in the old way, from fishing'. Don Barnard, *Walcott's Omeros: A Reader's Guide* (Boulder, Colorado: First Forum Press, 2014), p. 86.
[220] Derek Walcott, 'The Antilles: Fragments of Epic Memory', p. 75.

But they crossed, they survived. There is the epical splendour.[221]

By reimagining the crossing Walcott invokes the primary trope of the epic which is the source as rupture of the adamic New World: the journey, quest, or underworld passage. This is partially a re-enactment and repetition of traumatic origins. It is also a suturing and stitching of Old and New World horizons in attempt to heal and find wholeness and unity. It is fundamentally necessary for the artistic expression of New World poetics. It has at least two characteristics: a kenosis and acceptance is a journey and the harnessing of the creative power of transformation, renewal and energy inherent in the natural surroundings.

First, in a form of altered epic *katabasis* the adamic condition requires a journey to 'record the anguish of the race' in which actors and poets must 'return through a darkness whose terminus is amnesia' in order to 'articulate his origins' in 'self-extinguishing, self-discovery rites'.[222] This process is necessarily painful and terrifying. It is likened to an Orphic ritual of dismemberment and with it are associations of other psychological, cultural and literary descents into the collective memory or unconscious, myth and ritual, and the underworld. As an aesthetic *via negatvia* it involves self-sacrifice, abasement, and painful deprivation of body, memory in search of voice. Walcott hazards the exploration of a 'total darkness' into a primordial 'cave [which] should not contain a single man-made, mnemonic object'; a space where the 'noises should be elemental, the roar of rain, ocean, wind, and fire'.[223]

Second, the transformation of nothingness into an affirmation of poetic form via a quest passage involves a continual metamorphosis of traces in a series of actions which involves the doings and undoings of memory and forgetting, writing and saying of elusive forms and fragments. The centre of the New World experience is a creative source of transformation. For Glissant, this involves a process whereby the poet paradoxically must 'remake oneself every time on the basis of a series of forgettings'.[224] Moreover, this transformative creativity is intrinsically connected to the 'idea of creolization',[225] which

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[221] Walcott, *Omeros*, p. 149.
[222] Walcott, 'What the Twilight Says', p. 5.
[223] Walcott, 'What the Twilight Says', p. 5.
[224] Édouard Glissant, 'Creolization in the Making of the Americas' in *Race, Discourse, and the Origin of the Americas: A New World View*, ed. by Vera Lawrence and Rex Nettleford (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1995), pp. 268-275, p. 273.
[225] See below for theoretical discussion.

Breslin notes involves a process where, 'burning away' – or in this case a kenosis and journey within – evokes the 'other polarity of willed amnesia, annihilation of the past as a necessary precondition of entering the present'.[226] Whether Walcott proceeds via repetition, mimicry, transformation or alteration, the emphasis is never on mere mirroring or copying but creative relation and perpetual change in a cycle that repeats between the poles of erasure and inscription. Ultimately Walcott hopes the process is transformative, regenerative, and renewing in all its dimensions, individual, cultural, political and artistic.

The adamic becomes more of a state of being or mind, and is vital in the process of creativity, craft, and making. It is a perception of reality associated with new beginnings and constant recreation. It is also a fundamental stage of the creative process which must be undertaken by any poet or creative person who will need to find a space of separation, solitude and distance from the noise and activity of daily life, especially if it is characterised by urban rhythms. In that the Adamic is a 'condition that the poet gets into before he embarks on a poem', Walcott speaks to the process of creativity traversing through a state of unknowing in almost a manner of Keatsian negative capability.[227] Walcott certainly subscribes to a quasi-pastoral and Romantic notion of nature as a therapeutic space. For Walcott 'everything that has to do with the prelude to the creation of anything is an Adamic situation' and that this 'is the condition, that one is reduced to that nothingness before one makes something'.[228] Such a movement is also a 'wondering' and 'isolation that is there in the artist trying to make something' which is an 'Adamic thing'.[229] At his most utopian and hopeful, Walcott expresses this faith:

> We would walk, like new Adams, in a nourishing ignorance which would name plants and people with a child's belief that the world is its own age. […] Then even the old rules were exciting! Imitation was pure belief.[230]

[226] Breslin, *Nobody's Nation*, p. 111.
[227] Derek Walcott, '"The Argument of the Outboard Motor"', p. 134.
[228] Derek Walcott, '"The Argument of the Outboard Motor"', p. 135.
[229] Derek Walcott, '"The Argument of the Outboard Motor"', p. 135.
[230] Walcott, 'What the Twilight Says', p. 6.

Through this elemental transition, a new synthetic culture and a hybrid Caribbean man[231] might emerge who is sensitive to his surroundings and, with equanimity and acceptance of the past, and finds peace in the present:

> African, European, or Asian in ancestry, the enormous gently opening morning of his possibility, his body touched with dew, his nerves as subtilized to sensation as the mimosa, his memory, whether of grandeur or of pain, gradually erasing itself as recurrent drizzles cleanse the ancestral or tribal marking from the coral skull, the possibility of a man and his language waking to wonder here.[232]

Walcott's epic *Omeros* retains the conventional archetypal roots and routes through loss and nothing and back to the 'amen of calm waters'.[233] Just as loss is deemed necessary, so too, is survival regarded as heroic. Key to the journey motif undertaken by characters and narrator alike is the exploration of self and a belief in the transformative experience of the imagination inspired by nature and entangled histories – a poetics of relation. The adamic gift is of a form of sublime imagination and creativity which shapes the materials of daily life, and the objects and people encountered. The enlightened Adam will know that 'what is needed is not new names for old things, or old names for old things, but faith of using old names anew', and hoping this incantatory power evokes a richness and closeness of an experience of purification and baptism:

> Storm, I would say. River, I would command. Hurricane, I would say. I would utter 'leaf.' Tree. I would be drenched in all the rains, soaked in all the leaves.[234]

The 'Adamic' is a 'feeling that one can rechristen things, rename things' and this does not preclude the use of the same names.[235] And it means also that out of the ruins and decay of

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[231] Glissant also calls for the 'appearance of a new man' who he defines as 'a man who is able to live the relative after suffering the absolute'. He means by this a subject whose strength in survival is such can he/she accept diversity and the 'other's difference' despite having had to endure and suffer the abuses of the absolute, a legacy of colonial oppression and imposition of a 'truth on the Other'. Édouard Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse*, p. 147, 148.
[232] Walcott, 'The Muse of History', p. 53.
[233] Derek Walcott, 'A Sea-Chantey', *The Poetry of Derek Walcott 1948-2013*, p. 49.
[234] Walcott, 'What the Twilight Says', pp. 9-10.
[235] Derek Walcott, '"The Argument of the Outboard Motor"', p. 133.

a culture, the naming of a blade of grass signifies a major act of epic re-constitution through renewal. For a New World epic, this also means a poetics not primarily based, as Simone Weil deems the *Iliad* to be guilty of, on the force of man as hero and a conquering martial tribe building and founding city, states, and empires, but a more elemental humble construction from memory and nature. In an early poem committed to the construction of a Caribbean literary culture from the remains of colonialism, Walcott writes, 'There are no worlds to conquer, but worlds to recreate'.[236] The epic will not valorise monuments and shrines to power and colonial enterprise – of which there are very few in the Caribbean – but spaces of simplicity, light and love – and even, paradoxically unknowing. Walcott describes these places of inspiration as:

> […] cherishable places, little valleys that do not echo with ideas, a simplicity of beginnings, not yet corrupted by the dangers of change. Not nostalgic sites but occluded sanctities as common and simple as their sunlight.[237]

Emphasis here on the occlusion, hiddenness, and remoteness of the landscape is significant in illustrating another important feature of this adamic imagination of place: its complex and somewhat contradictory relationship to language and naming, as well as its resistance or opacity to discourse, including the poet. Walcott finds a nuanced and delicate route in the often treacherous terrain of cultural politics of representation, traversing on the one hand the dangers of replicating colonial tropes of the Caribbean as paradise, which would conceal and evade the historical legacy, complicity, and perpetuate stereotypes of island paradises; and on the other reducing the Caribbean to myths and narratives determined by history and replacing a nihilistic dismissal of Caribbean culture with equally nihilistic disregard for its multiple influences. In *Omeros* Walcott writes in adamic mode describing post-lapsarian second adams (his characters) after the fall of slavery and its consequent diasporas immersed their daily lives in an inviting yet indifferent seascape:

> The sea had never known

[236] Derek Walcott, 'Call for Breakers and Builders', *25 Poems*, p. 19, qtd. in John Thieme, *Derek Walcott: Contemporary World Writers* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999), p. 28.
[237] Derek Walcott, 'The Antilles', p. 82.

any of them, nor had the illiterate rocks,
nor the circling frigates, nor even the white mesh
that knitted the Golden Fleece. The ocean had

no memory of the wanderings of Gilgamesh,
or whose sword severed whose head in the Iliad.
It was an epic where every line was erased

yet freshly written in sheets of exploding surf
in that blind violence with which one crest replaced
another with a trench and that heart-heaving sough

begun in Guinea to fountain exhaustion here,
however one read it, not as our defeat or
our victory; it drenched every survivor

with blessing.[238]

**Shipwreck Aesthetics: Poetics and History in the Epic of Relation**

In this final section I discuss the strategies Walcott employs in his recuperation of the epic tradition. These are necessarily an interconnected extension of Walcott's ontological exploration of island being as adamic and the epistemological problems of a shipwrecked Crusoe which exemplifies the condition of the postcolonial artist in search of a collective myth and form for the expression of the Caribbean culture. Two basic questions undergird this final section. They are aesthetic and historiographical. In order to answer these questions, I highlight several strategies of reconstruction and filter these through a series of

[238] Walcott, *Omeros*, p. 295-296.

central metaphors and tropes in *Omeros* which act in a dialogical[239] manner: the vase, the quilt, the swift, and the shipwreck. In this way, I hope to analyse harmoniously questions of cultural poetics, generic questions related to epic, and the historiographic questions which emerge from these issues. Although these figures are integrated and interrelated, for the sake of argument, I will take the vase and the quilt to represent loosely the two aspects of each side of a metafictional battle or competition Walcott stages between the two central author figures – the Poet and the Historian – for the body and soul of the island represented variously through Helen, the St. Lucian people and her landscape. Through this conflict Walcott simultaneously constructs an epic but also critiques the very processes and tropes involved.

First, is the continuation of the genre problem of how to reconstruct the epic. The basis of the reconstruction is a reiteration of the often-commented postcolonial techniques of adoption and adaptation or use and revision which characterise critical responses to Walcott's ambivalent use of the Classical tradition.[240] Through the metaphor of the vase, Walcott reassembles a domestic counter-monumental object in order to engage with ideas of unity and multiplicity and more formally with the genre of epic as historical form. Through the quilt, Walcott employs self-reflexive notions of interlacing and entanglement of narratives and genealogies which complicate ideas of inheritance and influence. The quilting or weaving analogy is exemplified through the modernist novelistic techniques of several narrative threads and intersecting plot lines, multiple shifts in perspective and free-indirect speech. Finally, the swift represents the trans-historical and transnational crossing of the meridian of spatial and temporal zones in an epic of wandering and endurance.

Second, these figures and strategies are not solely aesthetic. Walcott goes beyond the formalist experimentation with a genre and the creolisation of cultural forms. Since epic

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[239] This is a deliberate inversion of Bakhtin's term which is usually reserved for the polyphony which characterises the novel. I believe that Walcott purposely hybridises the epic into a form which incorporates novelistic techniques (especially modernist) and as such these tropes function in a double sense: as metaphors and symbols integral to the fabric of the text, but also as self-reflexive significations and self-conscious explorations of generic form and meta-historiographical questions. Walcott's prose also depends heavily on these images. As an artist his visual images, and ekphrasis, are vitally important to the development of his argument whether they may be about cultural politics, tradition or history.

[240] As mentioned in the introduction, this is an established part of the criticism on Walcott's oeuvre, and especially *Omeros*, in which classical and postcolonial scholars evaluate the role and influence of classic forms and the extent to which Walcott accepts or refuses the epic comparison. My emphasis is slightly different here as I seek to show how Walcott's ideas on history and tradition undercut the assumptions of this debate.

always presumes an underlying philosophy of history, underpinning Walcott's aesthetic choices are ideas on history and tradition which invokes the question central to the definition of epic: how does the epic of relation 'include history'? As *Omeros* is part of Walcott's ongoing 'quarrel with history',[241] I show how he challenges a particular notion of history predicated on an idea of linear progress – what Walcott denounces as a 'vision of progress is the rational madness of history seen as sequential time, of a dominated future'.[242]

The former images (the vase, the quilt, and the swift) are significant to the way *Omeros* engages in Walcott's ongoing 'quarrel with history'. The vase represents a quotidian challenge to the grandeur of monumental history found in the statues of imperial heroes and masterpieces in metropolitan galleries. Similarly, the quilt connects fragmented histories together in a new intimate and domestic form. As crafted material objects they resonate with the presence of the past in the present and capture a unique and ambivalent Caribbean version of what Eliot termed the 'historical sense' or the 'perception, not only of the pastness of the past, but of its presence'.[243] The swift represents the poetic ability to travel and cross time zones and spaces opening literary experience to a world of cross-cultural connections. Again, the swift figure echoes Eliot's notion of tradition in an adapted form, the swift's crossings represents the simultaneity of past and present. In Eliot's words the 'historical sense, which is a sense of the timeless as well as of the temporal and of the timeless and of the temporal together'.[244]

Finally, in addition to these central images the shipwreck is a powerful presence in *Omeros*. Just as the vase, quilt and swift are dialogic and critical analogies which perform metaphoric and discursive work, the shipwreck is both a literal and meta-discursive element

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[241] The phrase is seminal in West Indian literary criticism. First used in a ground-breaking essay of 1976 by Edward Baugh, it captures the agonistic struggle, debate, and conversation of West Indian writers with the idea of History, in particular the problematic colonial and Hegelian dismissal of the West Indian experience. Baugh's argument tracks the creative response of West Indian writers such as Brathwaite, Lamming, but especially Walcott, as they attempted to write back against the deterministic and nihilistic philosophy of history which left the region blighted by a version of history which excluded them, reduced history to the record of the colonizer, and dismissed the region as an irrelevant 'nothing' without achievement or value. Edward Baugh, 'The West Indian Writer and His Quarrel with History', *Small Axe*, 16.2 No. 38 (July 2012), pp. 60-74.

[242] Walcott, 'Muse of History', p. 41.

[243] T. S. Eliot, 'Tradition and the Individual Talent', *Selected Prose of T. S. Eliot*, ed. by Frank Kermode, (London: Faber and Faber, 1975), p. 38.

[244] T. S. Eliot, 'Tradition and the Individual Talent', p. 38.

of the text. Achille dives and swims amongst one as he searches in vain for treasure from the mysterious and unknown wreck. Like the sea which has claimed the vessel, the shipwreck represents a foreboding haunted site of death, but also a space of fascination and magical transformation. This scene prepares the reader for Plunkett's historical research into the Battle of the Saints (1792). The wreck is also a historical site. Read with the knowledge of Walcott's influential essay 'The Muse of History', the meaning of the shipwreck is extended to include his meditation on history. However, by staging the hubristic and misguided attempts of Plunkett to historically inscribe, narrate, and account for the wreck in a sort of reconciliatory historiographical theodicy of the island using the methods of a positivist historian we witness Walcott at his most subversively anti-historical. The haunting and spectral presence of the shipwreck through the course of time is transformed into the alternative space of the coral bed, and as such what emerges is a provocative and rich account of change and historical process. This process is in contradistinction to the Hegelian dialectic or the Manifest Destiny of modernisation and technological development. Rather, employing Brathwaite's term, this is an alternative philosophy of history or 'Tidalectics'[245] which accounts for the ruptures of history and posits a fundamentally different version of history.

A last point about the status of metaphor and other figures of comparison in *Omeros* is necessary in order to highlight a crucial aspect of Walcott's poetics as it is directly related to his use of epic and classical allusions. First, metaphor is a fundamentally important poetic technique in Walcott's work. Beyond a colourful technique, he uses it 'in its larger sense, to include all figuration' and that in accepting 'figuration as a defining feature of poetry' it will often become a figure for figuration itself.[246] On the one hand, encapsulated in and beneath metaphoric resonances, is a productive idea of tradition[247] and epic that is trans-historical and cross-cultural, open to change and creation even within losses and ruptures. Through metaphor Walcott performs significant thinking as the figures are inextricably related to an

[245] The term is associated with Edward Brathwaite. See Elizabeth M. DeLoughrey, *Routes and Roots: Navigating Caribbean and Pacific Island Literature* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2007), p. 1-3
[246] Terada, *Derek Walcott*, p. 219.
[247] Pollard prefers the term 'tradition' to 'canon', partly because of its Eliotic inflection. Mainly it is because he argues that a 'canon' is organised by centralised, authoritarian formation which attempts to fix a text's value in a hierarchy. Whereas these poets' use of the term 'tradition' suggests an alternative formation to 'construct a contingent set of relations with their predecessors and their community to reorient a practice to serve a variety of collective identities'. Pollard, *New World Modernisms*, pp. 74-75. There is a certain equivocation here.

underlying argument. However, they are not merely illustrative examples of abstract logic to be jettisoned once a conclusion of the logical operation has been achieved. Rather they are self-reflexive, embodied and phenomenological figures of experience and communication of a West Indian intelligence. This often pictorial and sensual use of metaphor energises the freshness of adamic naming in a form of creolised unified sensibility. It is significant to note that while Walcott ascribes special power to metaphor in epic poetry – in 'tribal, elemental poetry, the epic experience of the race is compressed in metaphor' [248] – he is also deeply concerned about the obscuring and symbolic implications associated with these constructions, especially as they are implicated in a genre tainted by imperial and 'colonial epistemic violence'. Walcott registers throughout *Omeros* 'doubt as a crisis of representation' which expresses the 'poet's anxious awareness that his poetic craft does not do justice to the reality that he is trying to portray, or to articulate'.[249] On the other hand, as a mode of comparison, metaphor and other comparative techniques are attractive but also elusive and suspect for Walcott who is writing within an epic tradition whilst resisting it at the same time. Since *Omeros* writes against the grain of an epic tradition and also actively critiques the assumptions of the genre, metaphor, tropes, names, epic similes are all necessarily double edged. Walcott conceives of metaphor as an 'ontological and epistemological problem: it obscures reality, the reality that it presumably transports into the poem'.[250] As a result, Walcott's use of the metaphor and tropes is never culturally or ideologically naïve. It is historically located in a 'crystal of ambiguities'.[251] Through meta-fictional scepticism Walcott reveals a deep concern that metaphor tends to obscure and get in the way of the very thing to which it intends to celebrate: the people and story of the

[248] Derek Walcott, 'Muse of History', p. 47.
[249] Figueroa, *Not at Home in One's Home*, p. 153.
[250] Figueroa, *Not at Home in One's Home*, p. 155.
[251] Derek Walcott, *Another Life* (9.II.1351), p. 58. The phrase is used at a critical juncture in Walcott's autobiography when he realises the differences between an artistic medium which his friend Gregorias has mastered through romantic genius and his own literary craft which learns and adapts through scholastic mimcry. It provides an instructive parallel between the pictorial hopes for metaphor and the nature of language as an ambiguous and historically encoded medium. Gregorias seems to be able to capture the landscape with an original immediacy and freedom of spontaneity unencumbered by thought or tradition. He could 'draw | with the linear elation of an eel |one muscle in one thought' whereas Walcott's hand was 'crabbed by that style, | this epoch, that school | or the next'. Derek Walcott, *Another Life* (9.II.1357-1362), p. 59. Although Walcott may be guilty of creating a false dichotomy (art is just as circumscribed by its own 'language' with contested conventions, styles and schools) in this opposition, in his fraught association with language we witness Walcott's negotiation with discourse as a medium marked by history and tradition. In his argument in which he links ekphrasis to epic, Tobias Döring argues that this 'creative competition of poetry with painting' informs *Omeros* as a New World epic.

island. This is in essence the core of Walcott's controversial epic disavowal in which he claimed not have read the *Iliad* or the *Odyssey*, denounced a direct influence, and rejected the view of the poem either as derivative or as homage to these texts. In *Omeros* the narrator expresses his desire to 'see Helen | as the sun saw her, with no Homeric shadow' so that he may 'enter that light beyond metaphor'.[252] In an interview he revealed that the quest of *Omeros* was to try 'to hear the names of things and people in their own context' and view the Caribbean, 'the whole West Indian experience' as the thing-itself, 'not translated or with a film over it' so that you 'can see the object' but between you is 'artifice'.[253] While 'epic references and meanings' which are 'established by means of topoi, names and rhetorical strategies'[254] are present in the text and can be used to elucidate and validate experience, at the same time Walcott reveals a mistrust, querying whether these very techniques can, or indeed should be used to describe and portray St. Lucian life. As a New World epic *Omeros* 'constantly questions its own foundational figures as rhetorical disfigurement' and 'both produces and problematizes epic vision'.[255] This is the lesson that both Poet and Historian must learn in their interrelated odysseys which constitutes the very passages of the text of *Omeros*. [256]

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[252] Derek Walcott, *Omeros*, p. 271. The immediate comparison to David Jones's 'historical sense' is obvious. Jones seeks connections between epochs and all are part of his analogical imagination and endorsed by the incarnational and typological logic of his historical vision which embraces de la Taille's 'joy of symbolizing'. Staudt, *Turn of a Civilization*, p. 29. For instance, Jones's Lady of the Pool section revels in the possibilities of mythological repetition and similarities:

> The boatswain, from Milford,
> for each circumstance finding antique comparison.
> As though:
> he were with them in the ships when they cast off at the rape
> of Helen.

David Jones, *The Anathemata*, p. 149.
Crane, also shares a different, but perhaps more high-modernist ease or at least hope for correlation. A comment in his letters on his poem 'For the Marriage of Faustus and Helen' sets out his 'historical and literary sense' based on affinity: 'The whole poem is a kind of fusion of our own time with the past. Almost every symbol of current significance is matched by a correlative, suggested or actually stated, 'of ancient days'. Hart Crane, *Selected Letters*, p. 125.
[253] See Derek Walcott, 'An Interview with J. P. White (1990)', in *Conversations with Derek Walcott*, p. 173.
[254] Tobias Döring, Caribbean-English Passages: Intertextuality in a Postcolonial Tradition, (London: Routledge, 2002), p. 178.
[255] Tobias Döring, Caribbean-English Passages: Intertextuality in a Postcolonial Tradition, (London: Routledge, 2002), p. 176. Figueroa put it this way: the 'ethical twist in *Omeros* ultimately comes from the poem's questioning of the legitimacy of its own project'. Figueroa, *Not at Home in One's Home*, p. 162.
[256] In a similar vein Timothy Hofmeister argues that Walcott's use of classical analogy performs more than a basic connection of similarity, but enacts an almost simultaneous relation between an act of construction, for example positing similarity between modern and ancient or Antillean and Aegean, and the deconstruction of the analogy which breaks or dismantles the connection through a variety of techniques including dissimilarity, dissonance and nuance. This 'back-and-forth movement constitutes a manipulation of analogy by a

## Epic Restoration: Reassembling Antillean vase and interweaving the quilt of histories and 'ances-tree'[257]

To restore and heal this divisive culture or at least to articulate the diversity and multiplicity without necessarily homogenising or commodifying variety, Walcott invokes the vase as object and as metaphor to explain the utopian hope for epic art as an articulation of community and continuity in spite of fragmentation and discontinuities. In his Nobel Speech Walcott says:

> Break a vase, and the love that reassembles the fragments is stronger than that love which took its symmetry for granted when it was whole. The glue that fits the pieces is the sealing of its original shape. It is such a love that reassembles our African and Asiatic fragments, the cracked heirlooms whose restoration shows its white scars. This gathering of broken pieces is the care and pain of the Antilles, and if the pieces are disparate, ill-fitting, they contain more pain than their original sculpture, those icons and sacred vessels taken for granted in their ancestral places. Antillean art is this restoration of our shattered histories, our shards of vocabulary, our archipelago becoming a synonym for pieces broken off from the original continent.[258]

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progressive articulation of both the affinities and the disparities of its terms'. Timothy Hofmeister, 'Classical Analogy as Discursive Act: A Reading of Derek Walcott's "As John to Patmos"', The Poetics of Derek Walcott: Intertextual Perspectives, ed. by Gregson Davis, Special Issue of *South Atlantic Quarterly*, 96.2 (Spring 1997), pp. 275-292, p. 276. This elusive method in large part stems from Walcott's post-colonial ambivalence and reticence towards the classical tradition. Walcott cannot simply make classical comparisons and indeed whilst he invites them, is fascinated by their possibility, and they come spontaneously as a result of his education and literary passions, he finds he must resist them at the same moment. Thus, as Hofmeister argues, '[c]ontraditcions arise in this relation because the bases of affinity are numerous but so too are the differences in historical context and ideological and spiritual orientation'. Hofmeister, 'Classical Analogy', p. 287. Such a pattern of construction and deconstruction is evident in the figure of a vase shattered and reassembled, but also in the construction of elaborate epic connections within *Omeros* and their subsequent disavowal and dismissal in the end of the narrator's journey. The aspect of Walcott's work turns on the contested use of comparison which has specific textual and literary dynamics related to the debate about Walcott's classical inheritance, but is increasingly seen by critics such as Natalie Melas as part of an ideological inscription of colonial and neo-colonial exploitation and commodification of marginalised spaces. See Natalie Melas, 'Forgettable Vacations and Metaphor in Ruins: Walcott's *Omeros*', *Callaloo* 28.1 (2005), pp. 147-168.

[257] Derek Walcott, *Omeros*, p. 87.

[258] Derek Walcott, 'The Antilles: Fragments of Epic Memory', *What the Twilight Says*, p. 69.

Interestingly, Walcott complements his sentiment for a restored community of many broken pieces united by a seal or bond of a mutual sense of love with recourse to an object of daily use and simplicity.[259] A vase also suggests the aestheticisation of culture into a formal material object which, while on display, no doubt Walcott prefers to be used. As a monument of cultural heritage, I think Walcott deliberately chooses the quotidian, broken vessel to carry his grander poetic and epic values, and he will contrast this with the monuments of empire, the statues and the works of art which hang in museums in the metropoles of Europe. In these spaces of melancholic nostalgia, 'Art has surrendered to | History with its whiff of formaldehyde' and viewers or consumers of objects of high-cultural achievement are 'reverential mourners' who 'whispered like people in banks or terminal wards'.[260] The vase belongs like other objects in the lives of people to be used and reused. It is not meant to be gazed at from a distance and in its everyday use Walcott suggests the epic as artefact is a usable object of the present. Walcott's valuation of the vase contrasts the fetishisation of objects by History or capital: he resists the deathly reifying aura through which '[o]utside becomes a museum […] till every view is a postcard signed by great names'.[261]

This notion of the vase as an anti-monumental form reveals a particular view on aesthetic objects, tradition, and history. This connection is made clear when we take into account the claims of epic to commemorative monumentality, as if like Ozymandias' command we should look on such works and despair, or at least submit in awe. Throughout the text, however, Walcott critiques such pretensions. He lambasts a history based on the need for and celebration of monuments. It is the constitution and legitimisation of the history of the victor and the spoils of empire's wars. Walcott also undermines the claims of epic to be a lasting monument which would fetishize and reduce a people into the form of a statue or fixed object of veneration of past glories. Both of these attitudes stem from a view of history which Walcott disabuses in 'The Muse of History'. This is one in which the monument as representative of History, like the gaze of Medusa which fixes and freezes life,

[259] There is a striking parallel in Jamaica Kincaid's description of her creative process, '"It's as if you were given a broken plate and you rearranged it into a pitcher"'. See Jana Evans Braziel, *Caribbean Genesis: Jamaica Kincaid and the Writing of New Worlds* (Albany: State of University of New York Press, 2009), p. 6.
[260] Derek Walcott, *Omeros*, p. 182, 183.
[261] Derek Walcott, *Omeros*, p. 183.

petrifying it into a temporal linearity and condemning the living to status as slaves, victims or masters and revolutionaries.[262]

Equally important is the fact that the vase does not hide its faults and it bears the scars and pain and suffering of dislocation and relocation. It is not painted over by any glossy process akin to the airbrushing for tourist postcards of paradise or an attempted accurate verisimilitude or perfect reconstruction. Of course, the critical question (related to questions of genre so often preoccupying critics of Walcott attempting to classify *Omeros* and evaluate it accordingly) may be asked: is there an original form or model to which the pieces cohere? Furthermore, how is it that the pieces may be put together in terms of a tradition? In the explication of the image of a reassembled vase there lies a significant tension between the loss of form, fractured realities, and lost memories and the yearning for a pure epic and the true expression of holistic cultural traditions which affords Walcott and the people of the islands the freedom to experience the joy of creation and to partake in communal rites and rituals. If we, with some poetic licence perhaps, concede that the vase will have lost fragments and need replacement from the shards from other bits of broken pottery then the metaphor gains in resonating power. The original is remade of disparate pieces of mixed and strange pieces. The significance of the vase metaphor is to foster a sense of unity in diversity: however ill fitting, with gaps and rent pieces lost and unaccounted for, Walcott also stresses the process over the finality or perfection of the piece – it is in fact never perfect, it shows its scars and disparate, jagged edges.

For Walcott the poetic process of restoration is central to the idea of a new epic. This supersedes any idea of a generic essence or pure form. Like David Jones's archaeological and preservation method, Walcott relies on a binding and a gathering of fragments. Moreover, even if this is not possible in any return to an original, it is the 'care', 'pain', and suffering which endorses and validates the project.[263] In fact, the new vase, Walcott underlines, is stronger, more sympathetic to previously ignored and oppressed cultures, and as such it is a more meaningful object and site or source of memory and history. And this is

[262] Fumagalli opens her book on Caribbean modernity with the analogy: 'Medusa's myth is expedient for describing how modernity creates its 'others': in order to legitimize itself, it petrifies those who stand before it, freezing them into a state of what she calls perpetual backwardness, primitivism, or non-modernity'. Maria Cristina Fumagalli, *Caribbean Perspectives on Modernity: Returning Medusa's Gaze* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2009), p. 1.
[263] Derek Walcott, 'The Antilles: Fragments of Epic Memory', p. 69.

where, Walcott's differs from other rooted epics: this cultural preservation and re-integration creates a new form which transcends the original. It does not yearn for the original form. It does not seek its total re-constitution. It does not lament its imperfections. Fundamentally, he assumes and claims a sense of entitlement and ownership in the experience of the recreation of forms, and this marks the real sanctity of human cultural expression (not hankering after the historical perfection of the past).

Ashok Bery notes that the vase metaphor, with the etymological and functional implications of 'carrying across', joining of similarity in dissimilarity, and the 'tensions between coming together and falling apart' is inherent to the process of cultural and linguistic translation which is so characteristic of the Caribbean. Two dynamics are noticeable in 'constant negotiation between contrary forces': the 'bringing together and a differentiating' or the 'simultaneous accommodation and resistance' exemplified by the 'ill-fitting […] restoration which shows its white scars'.[264] It is 'both whole and not whole' as it 'displays cracks, it carries the sign of fragments which constitute it'.[265] This dynamic is cognate with the process of epic which is based on preservation of cultural materials and the record of encounters between cultures. As an analogy 'drawn from archaeological restoration',[266] the vase encapsulates the preservation and reconstruction with care and pain of cultural identities. With the obvious manifestation of scars, the lines and ruptures represent boundaries, points of fragile resistance and otherness which are also vitally important borders necessarily joined for re-use.[267]

Putting back together the vase is an act of necessary reconstruction – an act of *bricolage* and creolisation. For Raphaël Confiant who reinterprets the process of *bricolage* in

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[264] Ashok Bery, *Cultural Translation and Postcolonial Poetry*, (Palgrave Macmillan: London, 2007), p. 163.
[265] Ashok Bery, *Cultural Translation and Postcolonial Poetry*, p. 163.
[266] Gordon Collier, 'Multicultural Self-Definition and the Textual Strategy in the 'Poetic' Prose of Derek Walcott: The Nobel Prize Speech', *Kunapipi*, XV.2 (1993), pp. 86-103, p. 93.
[267] Ashok Bery quotes Walter Benjamin in a striking resemblance (may one even hazard this as a source for Walcott's image?):

> Fragments of a vessel which are to be glued together must match one another in the smallest details, although they need not be like one another. In the same way a translation, instead of resembling the meaning of the original, must lovingly and in detail incorporate the original's mode of signification, thus making both the original and the translation recognizable as fragments of a greater language, just as fragments are part of a vessel. (Bery, 174)

Walcott's quest is to express the epic language or the greater language which does justice to the parts in a new whole. It is not an attempt to find original meaning. This is lost in the state of traumatic amnesia of the catastrophic origins of the Caribbean. But it is an activity or mode which is intrinsic to the need for objects, the desire for material at hand and ready to use that drives cultural expression and initiates the reconstruction process.

a Caribbean context, this process is 'dependent on the intermixture of fragments' and involves the 'process of taking the materials at hand and using them in an improvisational fashion'.[268] These twin processes are creative acts of reconstruction and resistance part of the self-determination of survival and expression in the New World. It produces what Confiant has variously called a 'constituent mosaic', a 'kaleidoscopic totality', and 'the world defracted but recomposed'.[269] These are perfectly apt descriptions of the New World epic, and describe *Omeros* well in form and content. Importantly the new product, the new epic, does not smooth over the cracks and the fissures. They become a defining feature of the altered cultural form, and part of its own distinctive beauty. Again, Confiant provides an illuminating parallel:

> (In the Antilles, mixture occurs through the mode of diffraction,[270] of the heteroclite, of 'cultural *bricolage*' in Lévi-Strauss's sense of the term, and far from fusing to the

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[268] Wendy Knepper, 'Colonization, Creolization, and Globalization: The Art and Ruses of *Bricolage*', *Small Axe* 21 (October 2006), pp. 70-86, p. 71. Knepper further connects the two processes of *bricolage* and creolisation by quoting Françoise Vergès:

> Creolization is about *bricolage* drawing freely upon what is available, recreating with new content and in new forms a distinctive culture, a creation in a situation of domination and conflict. It is not about retentions but about reinterpretations. It is not about roots but about loss. It must be distinguished from cultural contact and multiculturalism because, at heart, it is a practice and ethics of borrowing and accepting to be transformed, affected by the other. In the current era of globalization, processes of creolization appear in zones of conflict and contact. They are harbingers of an ongoing ethics of sharing the world. Knepper, p. 71.

Furthermore, there is something particularly Crusoe-esque about *bricolage*. Lévi-Strauss describes the *bricoleur* whole 'rules […] are always to make do with "whatever is at hand," that is to say with a set of tools and materials which is always finite and is also heterogeneous'. Knepper, p. 71. Ramazani also privileges bricolage in Walcott's poetics: 'Modernist bricolage – the synthetic use in early twentieth-century poetry of diverse cultural materials ready to hand – has helped postcolonial poets aesthetically encode intersections among multiple cultural vectors'. Ramazani, *Transnational Poetics*, p. 99.

[269] Qtd. in Knepper, 'Colonization, Creolization, and Globalization', pp. 72-73.

[270] This term appears frequently in the literature on creolisation. With possible sources in from Deleuze and Guattari's appropriation of concepts from physics, it is also part of Glissant's lexicon. In *Poetics of Relation* he argues that the Caribbean Sea and broken archipelagos (as opposed to the Mediterranean which, surrounded by land, is enclosed and lends itself to a philosophy of the One) is conducive to the process of multiplicity though creolisation. It is a 'sea that explodes the scattered lands into an arc' and is a 'sea that diffracts' so that a 'new and original dimension allowing each person to be there and elsewhere, rooted and open, lost in the mountains and free beneath the sea, in harmony and in errantry'. It produces systems and languages which are 'always being open […] never fixed' and are not 'scattered or mutually diluted' but exposing the 'violent sign of their consensual, not imposed sharing'. Édouard Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, pp. 33-34. Glissant also connects the future of the epic to the process of diffraction: 'The epic is Problematic: its theme is of the future, its advent (its realized truth) can only open onto an unsuspected diffraction'. Which is to say, that the modern epic exists as a new fragile and uncertain form of relation of cultures, one which is not closed, bounded to a completed and absolute past, a History, but rather the interaction of open histories, contingencies, obscurities and a shared community of others. Glissant writes that to live the epic of relation is 'for each to wail the song of his land, and exhaustively to sing the dawn in which it appears to itself, and is already dissolving'. Not a

> point of effacing the traces of the origins, the cultural contributions of four continents were aggregated here and juxtaposed there, hardly ever disappearing themselves. The Creole does not possess a new identity like the Gallo-Roman or the Arab-Berber, but new identities. The phenomenon of creolization has invented from all these fragments a multiple identity.[271]

Whether representing the many peoples from different regions, their diverse languages, religions, and histories, the fragmented geography of scattered islands of the archipelago, or the broader continental pieces as cultural units akin to the passage of empires, Walcott assumes that even if there was at least once a primal original fit, the vase may still be restored to a functional form which is useful and of value both for its likeness and because of its scarred difference. It is a representation of the multiplicity of shapes that goes beyond the original. In terms of a collective vision, Walcott knows that mapping the totality of the islands is impossible. When asked in an interview about Eliot's notion of an 'unbroken arc of tradition' that encompasses Western civilisation Walcott astutely comments that such a statement is not necessarily true of the Americas, or in fact Western civilization either. He argues that there is only in fact a 'broken arc' and that there is nothing that is '"pure'' on this side of the world.[272] In fact, given the acceleration of modernity, Walcott states that a 'sensibility that has been broken and re-created is […] a more accurate description of our present situation'.[273] Putting all the pieces perfectly back together is forlorn and undesirable. To do so would, first, be impossible, and, second, more significantly, a replication of the very imperial will to order and control that Walcott resists throughout his literary oeuvre. What the vase lays bare is the brokenness and togetherness of cultures. The vase presents a combination of opacities, Glissant's term for the hidden, mysterious untranslatable fragments of cultural material. In its obvious repaired form, it resists effaced transparency, the system which would reduce and make all the pieces cohere and function in terms of a grand narrative of History. It is a visual representation of Glissant's description

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rooted epic of essence and nationalism, but rather an epic related to other songs and in a sharing in the 'world [of] (consensual opacities)'. Édouard Glissant, *Poetic Intention*, trans. by Nathalie Stephens (New York: Nightboat Books, 2010), pp. 192-194.

[271] Qtd. in Knepper, 'Colonization, Creolization, and Globalization', p. 72.

[272] Derek Walcott, 'Reflections Before and After Carnival: An Interview with Derek Walcott by Sharon Ciccarelli (1977)' in *Conversations*, p. 41-42.

[273] Derek Walcott, 'Reflections Before and After Carnival', p. 41-42.

of modern epic which 'would offer to unite the specificity of nations, granting each culture's opacity (though no longer as *en-soi*) yet at the same time imagining the transparency of their relations'.[274]

There is a direct example of this fitting together and retrospective encounter with the shattered history of the Caribbean when the narrator, on his Grand Tour travels to Europe, the Old World and across the dividing line created by Imperial cartographic order. 'Across the meridian' the narrator tries to look back at his home and his origins but he also finds his double, shadowed and split self who precedes him in an uncanny way as he travels through the imperial wharves. He 'had come | to a place' he 'felt he had known' and finds his 'shadow had preceded him'.[275] The moment is figured as the breaking of a vase-like wholeness and separation. Where '[o]nce the world's green gourd was split like a calabash | by Pope Alexander's decree' now the colonial condition is marked by splitting, doubleness and what Walcott elsewhere has described as 'the monumental groaning and soldering of two great worlds, like the halves of a fruit seamed by its own bitter juice'.[276] What is required by the text is a reversal and reassembling and both the vase, calabash and gourd suggest lines of divisions and the lines of travel necessary to reconstruct an epic. Crossing 'Pope Alexander's meridian' as a 'historical and poeticological, both concrete and imaginary figure' articulates 'the intimate yet troublesome connectedness of the Old World with the New' that Walcott's 'texts map out'.[277] The epic crossing is enacted by the swift which guides Achilles, sacrifices itself for Philoctete's cure, and is the tutelary figure for the narrator's transatlantic and metafictional crossings in stitching together lost fragments and broken parts:

> I followed a sea-swift to both sides of this text;
> her hyphen stitched its seam, like the interlocking
> basins of a globe in which one half fits the next
>
> into an equator, both shores neatly clicking

[274] Édouard Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, p. 55.
[275] Walcott, *Omeros*, p. 191.
[276] Walcott, *Omeros*, p. 191, Walcott, 'Muse of History', p. 64.
[277] Döring, *Caribbean-English Passages*, p. 188.

> into a globe.[278]

Seen in this light with its cognate forms, the vase is a rich metaphor for all sorts of cultural forms and practices in the Caribbean which rely on this process of improvisation, adaption, mixing and re-assemblage of sometimes disjunctive and disparate cultural fragments:

> Carnival, the Creole garden, cuisine, and music such as *zouk*, the *beguine*, and other improvised, composite forms are some of the specific results, traces, or by-products of *bricolage*.[279]

In the Nobel Lecture Walcott opens with a description of one such cultural practice which is described in conjunction with a migration of birds. The re-enactment of a story from the Hindu epic the *Ramayana* by the local Trinidadian Indian community coincides with his sight of birds in flight. Walcott castigates his initial sceptical and critical response to the *Ramleela* festival in the village of Felicity in which he evoked the dramatization with the 'sigh of History' or a mood of a loss, bereavement and condescension towards the scene.[280] This, Walcott realises, is the attitude of History, the view that looked on the Caribbean as 'illegitimate, rootless and mongrelized' so the rites were only 'parodic, even degenerate'.[281] All this view revealed were: '[f]ragments and echoes of people, unoriginal and broken'.[282] However, Walcott realises that once he ceases from 'filtering the afternoon with evocations of a lost India', the recreation of an Indian epic is as natural as the homecoming of scarlet ibises through the creeks of the Caroni Swamp.[283] It need not be dismissed with sigh of History and lamented as an empty gesture of lost origins and hollow echoes of an authentic home. Despite lost origins, there is a joyful perpetuation, continuation, and a 'celebration of a real presence' which Walcott 'locates' in the experience of the New World characterised by migrations, exile, and returns.[284]

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[278] Walcott, *Omeros*, p. 319.
[279] Knepper, 'Colonization, Creolization, and Globalization', p. 73.
[280] Walcott, 'The Antilles: Fragments of Epic Memory', p. 68.
[281] Walcott, 'The Antilles: Fragments of Epic Memory', p. 67.
[282] Walcott, 'The Antilles: Fragments of Epic Memory', p. 68.
[283] Walcott, 'The Antilles: Fragments of Epic Memory', p. 68.
[284] Walcott, 'The Antilles: Fragments of Epic Memory', p. 68.

In one sense, he ascribes an emerging and living epic to an appreciation of natural space named by the adamic. Here Walcott gives this power an archetypal, bodily inflection evoked with a performative drama: it suspires through natural breath, 'the two visions' of the *Ramleela* and the flight of the ibises 'blent into a single gasp of gratitude' and the 'sigh of History dissolves'.[285] As a response to the sigh of history, it is as if the two breaths are intimately related, but one is a taking in and the other a loss; one inspiration, inflation and elation, the other expiration, deflation and dejection.[286] And, in a second sense, in a mixed metaphor he finds tradition is not rooted or foundational in monumental permanence but rather part of an ongoing biological *and* geological processes. Despite the deprivation of an original language, Walcott claims that the source of the epic comes from the indentured tribe's creation of a new language which is constructed by 'accreting and secreting fragments of an old, an epic vocabulary' and energised by the creolising and primal 'ancestral', 'ecstatic rhythm in the blood that cannot be subdued'.[287] Elsewhere Walcott re-appropriates perilously tainted blood metaphors of disease, degeneration and miscegenation and combines them with the idea of health and vitality of the irreducible living present of Caribbean cultural life. History is a nightmare and a disease to be endured:

> The Caribbean sensibility is not marinated in the past. It is not exhausted. It is new. But it is its complexity, not its historically explained simplicities, which is new. Its

[285] Walcott, 'The Antilles: Fragments of Epic Memory', p. 70. Implicit in this would the cross-cultural connections to Egyptian mythology.
[286] Walcott, 'The Antilles: Fragments of Epic Memory', p. 70.
[287] Derek Walcott, 'The Antilles: Fragments of Epic Memory', p. 70. This language of accretion and sedimentation is echoed in Glissant's description of historical change and cultural formation in the Caribbean. As opposed to the lightning flashes of illumination of the moment (as if all of history could be contained in a vision of totality in a single instant) Caribbean history changes like its rivers or like the geological processes of accumulation of deposits of sediment (it is the poetics of duration). Édouard Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, p. 33. Elsewhere, however, Glissant seems to directly contradict this view of history when he argues that the trauma of slavery and the violent irruption of modernity in the Caribbean is unassimilable: 'Our historical consciousness could not be despotised gradually and continuously like sediment, as it were, as happened with those people who have frequently produced a totalitarian philosophy of history, for instance European peoples, but came together in the context of shock, contraction, painful negation, and explosive forces This dislocation of the continuum, and the inability of the collective consciousness to absorb it all, characterize what I call a nonhistory'. Édouard Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse*, pp. 61-62. Again, a Jonesian parallel is illuminating. The deposits and sedimentation of culture are described in geological terms in *The Anathemata*, but this passing footnote in Jones's introduction to *The Ancient Mariner* expresses the point of cultural interdevlopment and parallels between Welsh and Irish deposits: 'The names of the heroes may be totally metamorphosed and the events may occur in a very exactly defined locality but the motifs again and again are found to be indicative of a common heritage. Tangled accretions and differing influences of all sorts over centuries of time camouflage the resemblances and identities'. David Jones, *The Ancient Mariner*, p. 17.

> traces of melancholy are the chemical survivals of the blood which remain after the slave's and the indentured worker's convalescence. It will survive the malaria of nostalgia and the delirium of revenge, just as it survived its self-contempt.[288]

The festival is the expression of an awakening and celebration of the survival of history and resurrection and rebirth of new beliefs. Walcott rekindles old metaphors of Crusoe and bonfires in his explanation of the effigy burnt as part of the ceremony in terms of poetic creativity:

> And this is the exact process of the making of poetry, or what should be called not its 'making' but its remaking, the fragmented memory, the armature that frames the god, even the rite that surrenders it to a final pyre; the god assembled cane by cane, reed by weaving reed, line by plaited line, as the artisans of Felicity would erect his holy echo.[289]

These ideas have direct connections and indirect resonances in *Omeros*. The Indian festival has an obvious parallel in *Omeros* in Philoctete and Achilles's Christmas carnival performance. In the celebration history is collapsed and expiated in the joy of the crowd and 'the children's terror and their delight' and in whose cries 'was the ocean's distance over three centuries'. [290] Philoctete, cured and brimming with happiness and gratitude, 'the cancer's | anemone gone from his shin', dances and fights in a heroic warrior re-enactment with Achille.[291] For his performance as a 'warrior-woman fierce and benign' fighting and dancing on decorated bamboo silts, Achille dresses in a hybrid, motley costume which represents the various strands of the past and cultural influences, fusing and mixing gender, Christian, African and Caribbean rhythms.[292] His dress is transgressive and playful. He is wearing the contentious yellow dress (either stolen or given, it represents the problematic British legacy). He is adorned with miniature worlds, 'circular mirrors necklaced' and he

[288] Walcott, 'The Muse of History', p. 54.
[289] Walcott, 'The Antilles: Fragments of Epic Memory', p. 69.
[290] Walcott, *Omeros*, p. 274, p. 276.
[291] Walcott, *Omeros*, p. 274.
[292] Walcott, *Omeros*, p. 273.

wears a mitre, 'its panes like Easter kites'.[293] While the brass bells around his ankles are reminiscent of the chains of slavery they are purposely differentiated – they are 'fastened by himself'.[294] Common waste is transformed from 'rustling banana-trash' to decorate the bamboo stilts so that it 'would whirl with spinning Philoctete'.[295] The source of the energy of, and rationale for the rite, is not solely Christian, but syncretic and atavistic, in honour of his name's origins and ancestry. Achille has learnt the meaning and significance of the ritual

> from something older; something that he had seen
> in Africa, when his name had followed a swift,
> where he had been his own father and his own son.[296]

The carnivalesque performance of epic open-air street theatre is a cathartic release and it transforms the past. It is an act of individual release and collective binding. It involves a creative act of loss of self but also finding a deeper communal and historical connection. It is also a recreation of history and purgation of its pain. The rite is a ritual fight to the death but also a renewal and resurrection. For Achille, who was 'someone else',

> Today he was Africa, his own epitaph,
> his own resurrection.[297]

For Philoctete it is a painful re-enactment of his wound and cure which lingers in memory:

> All the pain
>
> re-entered Philoctete, of the hacked yams, the hold
> closing over their heads, the bolt-closing iron,
> over eyes that never saw the light of this world,

[293] Walcott, *Omeros*, pp. 275-276.
[294] Walcott, *Omeros*, p. 273.
[295] Walcott, *Omeros*, pp. 273-274.
[296] Walcott, *Omeros*, p. 275.
[297] Walcott, *Omeros*, p. 273.

their memory still there although all the pain was gone.[298]

In the performance, the witnesses are drawn together so that through laughter, excess, theatricality and joy the people 'would laugh | at what they had lost in the *paille-banane* dancers'.[299] Subtly Walcott's vase metaphor finds its place in *Omeros* in a fusion of a symbol of natural fertility as gourd and as mask:

today was the day when they wore the calabash
with its marks.[300]

Elsewhere in *Omeros* the vase is explicitly linked to the epic voice and a continuity of tradition through poetry of the people in their mixed vernacular idiom. Even the name '*O-mer-os*' exemplifies the vase in its form and content. It represents a scarred and fractured word from disparate language sources, broken and reassembled into a new signifying form – albeit a fragile one. Melas shows that the name Omeros is 'so radically detached from any original or authentic high-cultural referent that it becomes available to a new etymological appropriation' so that it is 'shattered like a word-object into fragments' and reconstituted as it re-enters into 'metaphorical relation with the Caribbean landscape'.[301] After hearing the origin and etymology of '*O-mer-os*' which subtly entwines the conch as communicative vessel of the ancient past with the vase, the poet-persona,

heard a hollow moan exhaled from a vase,
not for kings floundering in lances of rain, the prose
of abrupt fisherman cursing over canoes.[302]

By hearkening to an oral tradition Walcott attempts to harness the collective spirit of the vernacular infusing his epic with local legitimacy and authority. It is this freshness of living language and dialect that Walcott contrasts with the 'language of Ozymandias', thereby

[298] Walcott, *Omeros*, p. 277.
[299] Walcott, *Omeros*, p. 273.
[300] Walcott, *Omeros*, p. 273.
[301] Natalie Melas, 'Forgettable Vacations and Metaphor in Ruins: Walcott's *Omeros*', p. 161.
[302] Walcott, *Omeros*, p. 15.

adding another layer to the vase's resonances and significance. Poetry is embodied in the island itself: it is 'an island that breaks away from the main' of official public discourse or imperial written stories of conquest and command. The fragility of this epic language must be preserved in an epic monument that is as elemental and natural as 'raindrops on the statue's forehead […] the condensations of a refreshing element, rain and salt'.[303] However, the language is associated with echoes and moans and ineffable light. In one gesture, the effort of the epic effaces itself in the hope of a natural style beyond metaphor, one of adamic *sprezzatura*, which rejects 'the sweat made from the classical exertion of frowning marble'.[304] Or else, Walcott constructs an epic form as he builds a classically rich epic text through an 'elaborate verbal edifice made up of many narratives' with 'an extravagant web of imagery, metaphor, and allusion only to undo much of it at the end' and thereafter 'leaving only a kind of poetic memory'.[305]

The vase also has a cognate image in Maud's quilt, and it similarly performs the act of connecting and unifying cultural and aesthetic forms.[306] Pollard argues that the quilt is a 'work of art that depicts Walcott's cosmopolitan ideal for the contemporary public poet' whose aim is to 'show that the racial diversity of the Caribbean is the racial diversity of the world'.[307] The birds which she has woven are local and exotic.[308] They 'flew from their region' and represent the multiplicity of species and types.[309] Walcott gives the birds settling on the island a national or tribal inflection as they 'fluttered like little flags | from

[303] Walcott, 'The Antilles: Fragments of Epic Memory', p. 70.
[304] Walcott, 'The Antilles: Fragments of Epic Memory', p. 70.
[305] Melas, 'Forgettable Vacations and Metaphor in Ruins: Walcott's *Omeros*', p. 161.
[306] We may usefully recall David Jones's foregrounding of the mixed and multifarious character of the British Isles by pointing to the etymology of the name 'Pretanic' Isles from 'Pictic' in the Welsh and Old Irish forms manifesting aspects of the character of people intertwined with the landscape: 'Not only is our land a most mottled, dappled, pied, partied and brindled land, but so is our character, and so is the physical structure beneath and determining the surface of the land'. This essentially archipelagic consciousness and aesthetic has affinities with the interlacing forms of *The Anathemata* which is fused in the powerful orogenic descriptions of geological and climatic formations in 'Rite and Fore-Time'. More specifically in this instance, however, when thinking of this quality of English art, character and natural forms, Jones is drawn to 'an image signifying this distinguishing quality, a fretted, meandering, countered image': 'that kind of needlework called 'Opus Anglicanum''. The image lifted up in the poetry of the middle ages is 'a flowery, starry, intertwined image'. David Jones, 'An Aspect of the Art of England', *Dying Gaul*, p. 59. Nor should we forget Jones's description of the fragmentary but formed characteristic of *The Anathemata* itself in the 'Preface': 'Pieces of stuff that happen to mean something to me and which I see as perhaps making a kind of coat of many colours, such as belonged to 'that dreamer in the Hebrew myth'. David Jones, *Anathemata*, p. 34.
[307] Pollard, *New World Modernisms*, p. 188.
[308] Walcott, *Omeros*, p. 88.
[309] Walcott, *Omeros*, p. 88.

the branched island'.[310] While the birds represent the diversity of races, Walcott also links Maud's sewing to naming and language, and to Plunkett's (and by implication his own) writing:

> Mockingbirds, finches, and wrens,
> Nightjars and kingfishers, hawks, hummingbirds, plover,
> Ospreys and falcons, with beaks like his scratching pen's,
>
> Terns, royal and bridled, wild ducks, migrating teal,
> Pipers (their fledgling beaks), wild waterfowl, widgeon,
> *Cypseloides Niger*, *l'hirondelle des Antilles*
>
> (their name for the sea-swift).[311]

Interestingly, the quilt Maud weaves is in counterpoint to Plunkett's catalogue of historical data and listing of cannons, artillery and ships. As an allusion to the epic convention of naming and listing of heroes and ships, Walcott emphasises an alternative epic value, and by implication suggests a record of a living history of natural forms. Following the epic allusions Maud is loosely a Penelope figure, but Walcott makes sure that Maud is rendered saint-like in her activity. She is tireless, and, sewing by lamplight, 'her hair in the aureole cast by the shade | never shifted'.[312] She also has the gift of magical verisimilitude where her weaving is equated with bird's activities. To describe this Walcott creates a complex sound-image

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[310] Walcott, *Omeros*, p. 88, 89.

[311] Walcott, *Omeros*, p. 88. Walcott connects birds to nations, groups of people and languages in his idealistic poem, 'The Season of Phantasmal Peace'. The poem recounts 'Love, made seasonless' in a transitory moment of transcendence beyond human comprehension in the harmonious release from divisions of tribe, language, and the conflict of historical change from Empire to nation:

> Then all the nations of birds lifted together
> the huge net of the shadows of this earth
> in multitudinous dialects, twittering tongues,
> stitching and crossing it. […]
> and higher they lifted the net with soundless voices
> above all change, betrayals of falling suns,
> and this season lasted one moment, like the pause
> between dusk and darkness, between fury and peace,
> but, for such as our earth is now, it lasted long.

Derek Walcott, The Season of Phantasmal Peace', *Poetry of Derek Walcott 1948-2013*, pp. 327-328.

[312] Walcott, *Omeros*, p. 89.

fusing colour and form, patterning and rhythm. In the quiet of a domestic Eden with a dexterity of movement,

> her hands in the half-dark out of the lamplit ring
> in the deep floral divan, diving like a swift
>
> to the drum's hoop, as quick as a curlew drinking
> salt, with its hover, skim, dip, then vertical lift.[313]

And yet, the beauty of the quilt is haunted in at least two ways: first, some of the names are imposed. Like the slave names, the 'bright spurs [are] braceleted with Greek or Latin tags' speak of a legacy of cultural branding.[314] Second, Major Plunkett's premonition that the quilt will become Maud's 'shroud, not her silver jubilee gift' comes true.[315] Despite these associations with violence and death, Walcott transforms the quilt into a symbol of healing and integration. Maud as a *rhaspodos* or a 'stitcher of tales' alters the epic martial theme into a domestic pastoral and bucolic one which 'projects, not an ideal world, but the ineluctable disjunction between the idea and real'.[316] The memory of the shroud lasts longer than Plunkett's military researches, and without a son or heir, it is their true prophetic legacy for the island. The birds continue to flourish and breed, and unlike other migrating birds (or restless travellers and tourists) they stay and make the island their home:

> And those birds Maud Plunkett stitched into her green silk
> with sibylline steadiness were what islands bred:
> brown dove, black grackle, herons like ewers of milk,
>
> pinned to a habitat many had adopted.
> The lakes of the world have their own diaspora

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[313] Walcott, *Omeros*, p. 89.
[314] Walcott, *Omeros*, p. 88.
[315] Walcott, *Omeros*, p. 88.
[316] Gregson Davis, '"Pastoral Sites": Aspects of Bucolic Transformation in Derek Walcott's Omeros', *The Classical World*, 93.1, *From Homer to 'Omeros': Derek Walcott's 'Omeros' and 'Odyssey'*, (Sept.-Oct. 1999), pp. 43-49, p. 47.

of birds every winter, but these would not return.[317]

In the final *ekphrasis* image associated with the quilt, Walcott weaves a hopeful and perhaps idealistic tapestry of cultural diversity and mixture of histories, tastes and languages resolved into an accommodating English and a hybridised creole.[318] Ultimately birds, peoples and languages are permanently woven into and acclimatised to the natural changes of tides of the sea and landscape:

> The African swallow, the finch from India
> now spoke the white language of a tea-sipping tern,
> with the Chinese nightingales on a shantung screen,
>
> while the Persian falcon, whose cry leaves a scar
> on the sky till it closes, saw the sand turn green,
> the dunes to sea, understudying the man-o'-war,
>
> talking the marine dialect of the Caribbean
> with nightjars, finches, and swallows, each origin
> enriching the islands to which their cries were sewn.[319]

While these images of diversity and relation are directly part of the symbolic texture of *Omeros*, the ideas implicit in them are also a self-referential part of the formal aspects and poetic techniques of the poem itself. The vase and quilt are metafictional emblems for the integrative reassembling and inter-weaving of narratives and genealogical lines of inheritance and influence. The first observation is evident in the choice many critics make for their description of the narrative form of *Omeros*. Ashok Bery considers the poem itself as a reassembled vase that is 'constituted of a number of different types of fragments', for

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[317] Walcott, *Omeros*, pp. 313.

[318] The ideal of which is expressed by Walcott in the following interview when he talks about finding a common language amongst the unique dialects for his theatre to succeed:

> It is like making an amalgam, a fusion, of all the dialects into something that will work on stage.

Walcott, 'Reflections Before and After Carnival', pp. 42-43.

[319] Walcott, *Omeros*, pp. 313-314.

example cultural traditions, locations, and various pieces of European epic traditions.[320] Isabella Maria Zoppi refers to the difficulty of summarising *Omeros* because 'there is no single line of development; rather, like Penelope's woven cloth, there are interwoven threads, complex patterns, all against the background of collective memory'.[321] Hamner describes the integrated plotted multiple shifts in temporality and movements in memory and space such as the various character's search for paternal lines, origins and home in terms of a weaving metaphor: 'Walcott is constantly moving forward by looping backward to advance the separate threads of his multiseamed narrative' and also that '[s]trands of Omeros continue to weave together complete segments of the open design'.[322] Walcott encourages these types of observations as the metaphors are part of his own overt metafictional practice throughout the poem. He acknowledges in the narrator's first intervention that, 'This wound I have stitched into Plunkett's character'.[323]

The continued self-referential description of the plot and narrative form is extended to a notion of tradition which is not a simple linear progression of great works and influences, but a complex pattern in interlaced threads weaving together different inheritances.

The swift, linked to Maud's needle also performs the healing suturing together of divisions, enacting spatial and temporal crossings of the globe, and re-assembling pieces into a vase like world figured also as hemispheres of the brain:

> I followed a sea-swift to both sides of this text;
> her hyphen stitched its seam, like the interlocking
> basins of a globe in which one half fits the next
>
> into an equator, both shores neatly clicking

[320] Ashok Bery, *Cultural Translation and Postcolonial Poetry*, p. 164-165.
[321] Isabella Maria Zoppi, '*Omeros*', p. 509.
[322] Hamner, *Epic of the Dispossessed*, p. 72, 138. In a series of somewhat mixed metaphors Hamner also describes the narrative form in terms of the sea, rivers, manuscripts, weaving, and organic growth: 'In this section of *Omeros*, the intermingling of past, present, and future combined with the superimposition of authorial presence over narrative action generates yet another palimpsest of discourses. Rather than resembling a steady flowing stream, the narrative may be more fittingly compared to the motion of waves, surging and ebbing with the tide. Successive episodes replace their predecessors, seamlessly complementing, finishing, and initiating another action that grows out of itself'. Hamner, *Epic of the Dispossessed*, p. 130.
[323] Walcott, *Omeros*, p. 28.

into a globe […]

her wing-beat carries these islands to Africa,
she sewed the Atlantic rift with a needle's line,
the rift in the soul.[324]

Intrinsic to all these figures of recuperation in both their aesthetic and historical guises is a dynamic which Steve Mentz in *Shipwreck Modernity* has termed 'theft and composture'.[325] This dynamic explains both Walcott's relationship with tradition and the past, and reveals his underlying ideas about time and history. In his 'ecological theory of historical change' Mentz offers 'two mutually implicated models' to show how 'historical systems alter' and change. The first is the narrative of modernity which relies on radical disjuncture and clearly delineates periods of stark difference and change. For Mentz, however, 'theft' describes the 'key transaction hidden inside familiar just-so stories about historical breaks' and which 'recalls a long-lived caricature of a modernity that gives birth to itself by stealing from classical antiquity'.[326] This idea accounts for the notion of modernity as a radical break, for instance, by conceiving of it in terms of the usurpation of the ancient by the modern resulting in absolute temporal difference and an irrecoverable series of losses. In order to render itself novel, the modern, figured as radically new and distinct from the past, actualises itself in a distancing effect. It portrays the past as dead time, archaic, and irrelevant. In terms of the epic as a form, it is redundant and obsolete, an archaic form of a naïve historical consciousness surpassed by enlightened modernity. But the implication of

[324] Walcott, *Omeros*, p. 319.
[325] Steve Mentz, *Shipwreck Modernity: Ecologies of Globalization, 1550-1719* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015), p. ix.
[326] Steve Mentz, *Shipwreck Modernity*, p. ix. Susan Stanford Friedman recognises the notion of 'theft' and categorises it under the variety of 'keywords for interculturalism' which can be sorted into 'distinctive rhetorics based on the main arenas of the rapid change associated with modernity'. Susan Stanford Friedman, *Planetary Modernisms*, p. 63. Such a term is part of array of terms which describe the circulations and translations implicit in intercultural encounters so characteristic of modernity. Modernity's multiple 'borderlands of contact zones create creolization on all sides through patterns of imitation, adaptation, transculturation, and cultural translation'. Susan Stanford Friedman, *Planetary Modernisms*, p. 63. Since '[t]heft invokes crime' it is part of the 'commercial' rhetoric along with 'borrowing, circulation, commerce, debt, exchange, endebtedness, incorporation, importation, lending, merger, theft, traffic'. Susan Stanford Friedman, *Planetary Modernisms*, p. 64. As such it marks Walcott's text as a commodity and suggest it is integrated in a network of exchanges in a system called by critics, world literature. These ideas have been explored in very recent criticism on Walcott's Omeros:

Mentz's theory is in effect that the modern accomplishes its own re-birth and novelty by subterfuge: it steals from the past to make new forms, appropriates and re-fashions objects, and re-inscribes a narrative of continuity privileging experimentation which has been sourced from the energies of primitivism and the accomplishments of the past.

To give the idea of theft a more postcolonial reading in line with Walcott's poetics, it is clear that theft signifies a complex knot of issues of ownership, legitimacy, and authenticity associated with literary creation and canon formation. It also speaks of the notion of debt and the burden of the past to which moderns have respectively tried to pay off or free themselves from. Walcott's own reflections on aesthetic methods in his poems and interviews draw on the idea of theft, rightful ownership and inheritance, as he mediates them through the language of modernism, especially Eliot's famous dictum, 'Immature poets imitate; mature poets steal; bad poets deface what they take, and good poets make it into something better, or at least something different'.[327] For Walcott, the colonial subservient bastard who is barred legitimate access to the house of fiction, wryly writes,

> I had entered the house of literature as a houseboy,
> filched as the slum child stole,
> as the young slave appropriated
> those heirlooms temptingly left
> with the Victorian homilies of *Noli tangere*.[328]

Elsewhere Walcott has spoken caustically in an aesthetic 'realpolitick' concerning the necessity of theft as it is an intrinsic part of the way cultures change:

> The whole process of civilization is cyclical. The good civilization absorbs a certain amount, like the Greeks. Empires are smart enough to steal from the people they conquer. They steal the best things. And the people who have been conquered should have enough sense to steal back.[329]

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[327] T. S. Eliot, 'Philip Massinger', *Selected Prose of T. S. Eliot*, Ed. by Frank Kermode (London: Faber and Faber, 1975), pp. 153-160, p. 153.
[328] Derek Walcott, *Another Life*, (12.II.1835-1839), p. 77.
[329] Derek Walcott, 'This Country is a Very Small Place. Interview with Andrew Milne (1982)', in *Conversations with Derek Walcott*, ed. William Baer (Jackson: University of Mississippi, 1996), p. 70-78, p. 75.

When he is not condoning an artful practice of 'filching' Walcott subverts the idea of ownership completely. Finding no mutual exclusion between a Caribbean identity and a writer using English, Walcott comments,

> I am primarily, absolutely a Caribbean writer. The English language is nobody's special property. It is the property of the imagination: it is the property of the language itself.[330]

He boldly asserts his common right to the English language not with the title deeds of an exclusive proprietary rights but only as an apprentice and one who has made the effort to labour and struggle. The ambiguity here (between stealing and the claim to common property) does not necessarily mean a contradiction but a description of the paradox of a New World writer who finds himself in a relationship with tradition that is both 'moment of surrender and claim, dispossession and possession' of tradition, but where the most significant act is that of the 'claim' of self-conscious self-fashioning and creation.[331] Like his notion of the adamic, Walcott's engagement with the classics and tradition is a bittersweet relationship. It is one which he has described as the 'ancient war between obsession and responsibility' finally concluding that, 'The classics can console. But not enough'.[332]

Theft, however, as Mentz argues is not the only mechanism or explanation for cultural transmission and historical change. 'Against' theft as a model of 'radical disruption and new ownership' Mentz suggests an 'ecological metaphor': 'composture'.[333] Composture captures an ongoing process in which 'the past, like the recycling, never goes away' so that this 'vision imagines history as a comingling and fecund process, a fertilizing combination of the living and the dead'.[334] Mentz compares the idea to Glissant's notion of creolization and history as an 'accumulation of sediments'. Importantly for our understanding of Walcott, composture offers an alternative model of history to the linear conception. It 'recognizes

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[330] Derek Walcott, 'Derek Walcott, 'The Art of Poetry XXXVII, Edward Hirsch (1985)', in *Conversations with Derek Walcott*, p. 106.
[331] Derek Walcott, 'Culture and Mimicry', *Critical Perspectives*, p. 54.
[332] Derek Walcott, 'Sea-Grapes', *The Poetry of Derek Walcott 1948-2013*, p. 197.
[333] Steve Mentz, *Shipwreck Modernity*, p. x.
[334] Steve Mentz, *Shipwreck Modernity*, p. x.

multiple presences in multiple states of decay at all times'.[335] The system is 'polychromic' produces both 'violence and meaning' as it is shot through with 'multiple temporalities'.[336] Walcott's persistent use of the sea as a figure for history, his description of the Atlantic as the space of modernity as grave and abyss as well as source of life, traffic, and crossings resonate with the idea of a cyclical model of history. We can be more specific, however, when it comes to the idea of composture. First, Walcott invokes the process in his summation of a life's literary work and love for classical allusion which ultimately finds its place on the island, not in a transcendent realisation of the eternal image of truth manifested in the form of Helen, but in a pile of decaying and layered matter:

> All that Greek manure under green bananas,
> under indigo hills, the rain-rutted road,
> the galvanized village, the myth of rustic manners,
>
> glazed by the transparent page of what I had read.[337]

Activating the double meaning of composture and composing to describe the creative and destructive processes suggests an 'ecological and catastrophic theory of historical change' which resonates with Walcott's epic vision situated on the beach facing the sea which contains the past and suggest the immediacy of the present. The last lines of *Omeros* resound and echo on the surf:

> When he left the beach the sea was still going on.[338]

[335] Steve Mentz, *Shipwreck Modernity*, p. x.
[336] Steve Mentz, *Shipwreck Modernity*, p. x.
[337] Derek Walcott, *Omeros*, p. 271.
[338] Derek Walcott, *Omeros*, p. 325.

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